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# Feminist and Lesbian Relations in Buffalo, New York and the Nation During the 1970s

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Feminist and Lesbian Relations in  
Buffalo, New York and the Nation  
During the 1970s

By

Alyssa Hickey

An Abstract of a Thesis  
In  
History

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements  
For the Degree of

Master of Arts

August 2014

SUNY Buffalo State  
Department of History & Social Studies Education

Abstract

The Feminist Movement of the 1970s focused on the liberation of women. When lesbian feminists demanded equal rights feminists decided to address lesbian issues. In Buffalo, New York the acceptance of lesbians into the Feminist Movement was predominantly positive due to the deep friendships within the activist community. However, there were major tensions due to classism, lesbian baiting, and sexual orientations within the Feminist Movement. Buffalo, New York followed the national organizations in accepting lesbians into the Feminist Movement.

State University of New York  
College at Buffalo  
Department of History & Social Studies Education

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## **Feminist and Lesbian Relations in Buffalo, New York and the Nation during the 1970s**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this essay is to examine the relationships between second wave feminists and lesbians in Buffalo, New York and the nation. The Feminist Movement of the 1970s, also known as the second wave of feminism, was a social movement for the better treatment of the female sex. It fought to create an equal society with no gender roles. This was in response to the centuries of mistreatment that women faced at the hands of a patriarchal society. The Feminist Movement of the 1970s was called the second wave of feminism in the United States of America. The first wave of feminism gained women the right to vote in 1920; the second wave of feminism gained women anti-discrimination laws and the freedom to pursue a career instead of motherhood, or both. After the Civil Rights and Anti-War Movement of the 1960s, women across the country came together to fight for their rights as women. In Buffalo, New York, women created their own chapter of the National Organization for Women around the early 1970s. They passed numerous policies that progressed the rights of women.

Women focused on legal rights and policies of the United States government to achieve equality with men. Some of these policies such as the Equal Rights Amendment failed in 1979 and others such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 succeeded. In Buffalo some of the first non-discrimination policies against gender-identity in the country passed.<sup>1</sup> These policies helped in the workplace with discrimination against married or pregnant women. It aided women with furthering their education, enabling all classes the ability to go to college. These policies also

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<sup>1</sup> Christy Mallory, and Sarah Liebowitz, "Local Laws and Government Policies Prohibiting Discrimination Based on Gender Identity in New York," *The Williams Institute*, June, 2013, <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Mallory-Liebowitz-NY-local-laws-Jun-2013.pdf> (accessed April 9, 2014).

affected women who needed access to public housing and other public services. With legal rights protected, women had legal standing in court against discrimination.

In the earlier generations of the Feminist Movement, the first and second wave, feminist media accused them of being a movement only for white heterosexual middle-class women. This accusation spread from the discontent of the women who did not fit into those categories. The rights fought for targeted their concerns without assessing the issues of women from other classes, races, and sexual orientations. As the second wave progressed, it encompassed its minority sisters, racial and homosexual, and their issues into their agenda. Legislature and policies were not the central focus, instead, the focus shifted to awareness groups and organizations. Some of the local Buffalo organizations included the National Organization for Women or NOW, the Gay Center in Buffalo (supported by the Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier and the Sisters of Sappho), and SHADES<sup>2</sup>, a lesbian organization for people of color. This change gathered feminist and gay liberation activists into one community, creating alliances between multiple organizations. One of the alliances of the NOW chapter of Buffalo was with the homosexual community of Buffalo.

In reaction to the call for society's change, some men and women lesbian baited feminists. Lesbian baiting is accusing a woman of being a lesbian in order to scare her back into society's role. An example would be if a woman was arguing with a man and he claimed her to be a lesbian, just to shock her and make her back down from the argument. Gloria Steinem was often a recipient of lesbian baiting because of her leadership position in the Feminist Movement.<sup>3</sup> The media used lesbian baiting as an insult in order to silence feminists. However, as the Feminist Movement progressed it united with the Gay Liberation Movement that developed

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<sup>2</sup> This is not an acronym, the title was originally SHADES OF COLOR but they shortened it. Sherrie Lowther, "PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE." *SHADES OF COLOR*, No. 4 (1993): 1. Box 48, Folder 25.

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Heilburn, *The Education of a Woman* (New York: The Dial Press, 1995), 165.



around the same time. The Feminist Movement included lesbian issues into their issues and lesbian baiting soon turned into a compliment.

Buffalo, being a close-knit blue-collar town, allowed for the creation of organizations, such as the Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier, the Buffalo Chapter of NOW, and DIGNITY/BUFFALO. The Mattachine Society was created for the gay community in Buffalo, NOW focused on feminist issues in Buffalo, and DIGNITY/BUFFALO supported religious Christian homosexuals. These organizations interacted and worked with each other in their missions of advancing the homosexual and feminist communities. The close relations that the citizens of the city of Buffalo had with one another created an accepting and proactive atmosphere for the Feminist and Gay Liberation Movement. Personal connections between activists and non-activists heavily influenced the acceptance of lesbians and feminists in Buffalo and the nation. It was because of that atmosphere that the Buffalo chapter of NOW accepted its lesbian sisters into the community. Feminists accepted lesbians into the Feminist Movement of the 1970s for numerous reasons. One was because of the correlation of growth of each movement from the 1960s to the 1970s. The second was fighting for women's rights and issues caused by the abuse of the patriarchal society. Then the third was that Buffalo, New York accepted the changes in society alongside the nation.

The tensions within the movements remained. Feminists had a difficult time addressing lesbianism while lesbians resented the lack of understanding, about their struggles, from the feminists. Buffalo and the nation soon learned that in order to bridge the gap between the two communities there needed to be a personal connection. Even through the struggles of classism, lesbian baiting, and general miscommunications, personal relationships between activists thrived. The positive connections that slowly developed out of the strife and tensions between the

lesbians and feminists were created by friendships and the personal touch. This paper strives to reveal the tensions and reward the friendships that the women of the Feminist and Gay Liberation Movements experienced.

## **History of Feminism**

The history of feminism began in the early stages of the United States. Women had always fought for their rights “through community activism, board-based mobilization, policy advocacy – or through a variety of other means – women have pursued social, political, and legal change to improve their lives, choices, and opportunities”<sup>4</sup> Although feminists did share one main goal, they were not a cohesive group, in that they had multiple factions focusing on different issues such as lesbian feminists, black feminists, radical feminists, etc. That goal was the advancement of women. However, the lack of cohesiveness of the feminists led to racial, classist, and homophobic tensions.

The definition of advancement of women changed over time. For the first wave of feminism, the advancement was gaining the right to vote for white middle-class women.<sup>5</sup> The second wave of feminism is what this paper focuses on, the Feminist Movement of the 1970s. While the second wave of feminism sought to include all women, they failed in many aspects. Lesbians were not welcome into the Feminist Movement until later into the 1970s. People of color did not feel welcome in an environment that did not address the issues of racial discrimination, alongside feminist issues. Working-class women often clashed with middle-to-

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<sup>4</sup> Gwendolyn Mink and Barbara Smith, “Feminisms,” In *The Reader's Companion to Women's History*, eds. Wilma Mankiller, Gwendolyn Mink, Marysa Navarro, Barbara Smith, and Gloria Steinem, 192-197. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

upper class women for educational and labor rights.<sup>6</sup> However, this did not stop the feminists on all sides from advancing in society.

The first wave of feminism began from the activists of the Abolitionist Movement. There were calls for more women's rights before the Abolitionist Movement. Yet, the organization of the Abolitionist Movement inspired women to formally organize and end legal discrimination against women.<sup>7</sup> This group of feminists consisted mainly of middle-to-upper class white women. From July 19-20, 1848 Seneca Falls, New York held the world's first women's convention, specifically about women's rights. The convention produced the "Declaration of Sentiments," a document about the grievances that women had against the oppression of men. This document did not include the right of suffrage because the women believed that would compromise the rest of the document.<sup>8</sup> Another convention was held two weeks after in Rochester, New York and inspired the tradition of annual women's conventions.<sup>9</sup> The first wave of feminism succeeded in gaining suffrage but eventually dwindled until the late 1950s.

Although this paper focuses on the Feminist Movement of the 1970s, the second wave of feminism began in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This was in part due to the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-War Movement of the 1960s. One of the major catalysts of the reemergence of the Feminist Movement was the oppression that females felt in other social justice movements such as the Civil Rights, Anti-War, and New Left. While females were active in these organizations they were often relegated "to play subordinate roles, and they were often

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<sup>6</sup> Gwendolyn Mink and Barbara Smith, "Feminisms," In *The Reader's Companion to Women's History*, eds. Wilma Mankiller, Gwendolyn Mink, Marysa Navarro, Barbara Smith, and Gloria Steinem, 193. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>8</sup> Andrea Tone, "Seneca Falls," In *The Reader's Companion to Women's History*, eds. Wilma Mankiller, Gwendolyn Mink, Marysa Navarro, Barbara Smith, and Gloria Steinem, 523-524. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 524.

locked out of leadership or decision-making positions.”<sup>10</sup> The females began meeting separately and eventually brought on the second wave of feminism. Women who organized and participated in the previous movements, such as Carol Speser, Ti-Grace Atkinson, and Gloria Steinem, eventually transferred over into the Feminist Movement. These women utilized their knowledge from the previous movements to form an organized Feminist Movement. Betty Freidan cofounded the National Organization for Women or NOW with Shirley Chisholm and Muriel Fox. This organization fought for the political rights of women. Shirley Chisholm was black, as were other founding members of NOW. Any racial concerns were put aside for political advancement of women. Like the first wave of feminism, the second wave focused on white heterosexual middle-class women. Women of color, working-class women, and women of different sexual identities organized under their own feminist flags, to make up for the lack of inclusion. In New York State, Black feminists formed the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO).<sup>11</sup> Working-class women formed the organizations, Nine to Five and the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW).<sup>12</sup> Lesbians already had the Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society. In this paper the focus will remain on the relationship between the lesbians and the feminists, during the second wave of feminism.

## Source Materials

The source materials for this papers were mainly found in newspapers, journals, and books. Inspiration for this paper was found during an internship at the Women and Gender

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<sup>10</sup> Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Lesbian Feminism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 213.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Smith, “Black Feminism,” In *The Reader's Companion to Women's History*, eds. Wilma Mankiller, Gwendolyn Mink, Marysa Navarro, Barbara Smith, and Gloria Steinem, 202-204. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Gwendolyn Mink and Barbara Smith, “Feminisms,” In *The Reader's Companion to Women's History*, eds. Wilma Mankiller, Gwendolyn Mink, Marysa Navarro, Barbara Smith, and Gloria Steinem, 196. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

Studies Archives. The internship required my implementation and recommendation of the organization of the Women and Gender Studies Archives. This meant that I had the chance to read primary sources and then organize them into a cohesive data collection. During this inventory check, the journal *off our backs*, repeatedly appeared. I noticed numerous articles about lesbians and their acceptance into the Feminist Movement during the 1970s. I believed, at that point in time, that the feminists and lesbians often did not agree on issues. Ergo, it was intriguing to find the contrary in a feminist journal.

The resources for the paper expanded from the Women and Gender Studies Archives at SUNY Buffalo State. Other materials, such as books and articles, came from the access to the Archives and Special Collections of SUNY Buffalo State, Madeline Davis GLBT Archives of Western New York, and the Butler Library on SUNY Buffalo State campus. These archives provided insight to Madeline Davis, a prominent GLBT activist in Buffalo. The records of SHADES, an organization for lesbians of color in Buffalo, were useful in understanding the Buffalo community. A majority of the information about the gay community in Buffalo and its interactions within itself and within Buffalo as a whole came from the Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier's newsletter, *The Fifth Freedom*. The information that *The Fifth Freedom* provided was vital. There were numerous articles about the racial and sexist tensions among the Mattachine Society members. This periodical reflected the thoughts and feelings of Buffalo's gay community, and consequently the lesbian community, during the 1970s.

Buffalo was specifically chosen in the research because of the connection that SUNY Buffalo State has with the GLBT and feminist community. The convenient access to multiple sources on one campus was also a deciding factor to focus on Buffalo. It then turned into a paper of Buffalo, New York versus the nation. The contrast between Buffalo and nation would

emphasize not only the progress of the Buffalo community but the setbacks. I desired to know where Buffalo succeeded and failed in its relationship between the lesbians and feminists.

The most important source was the interview between Carol Speser and myself. Carol Speser was and is a prominent activist in the Buffalo community. Her interview inspired further research into classism, individual relationships, and lesbian baiting. With her guidance, I expanded the depths of the research and better interpreted the relationship between the feminists and lesbians in Buffalo, New York and the nation during the 1970s.

## **Research and Critique**

### **Feminism**

The second wave of feminism began in the late 1960s and grew in momentum until it hit its peak in the 1970s.<sup>13</sup> It was considered the second wave of feminism because the first wave gained the right to vote. What inspired the second wave of feminism was the activism of the 1960s revolving around Civil Rights and the Anti-War effort.<sup>14</sup> Many college campuses formed political groups, the “new” left, in retaliation to the war in Vietnam. As protests on college campuses and state capitals grew more frequently, the atmosphere for realization and vocalization grew.

Women joined these radical political groups and protests in support of the cause but they soon realized that there was another cause to fight for. The more active a woman became the more scorn she received from her fellow rebels.<sup>15</sup> Generally women in the protest groups were limited to that of secretarial work, or other stereotypical female work such as preparing food,

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<sup>13</sup> Gwendolyn Mink and Barbara Smith, *Feminisms* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 195.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

etc.<sup>16</sup> The knowledge and the experience of being treated as a second class citizen based on sex with the added activist atmosphere created the second wave of feminism. Feminists vowed to break down the gender roles, gain equal rights for women, and have support for women by women.

The Fourth Edition of *Issues in Feminism: An Introduction to Women's Studies* by Sheila Ruth is a supplementary guide on current and past issues of feminism. The second wave of feminism was addressed in the documents, focused on class distinctions, racial diversity, equality in legislature, and a declaration of all women. These articles exemplified the diverse qualities and issues of the Feminist Movement of the 1970s. In 1967 the National Organization for Women, or NOW, produced a document called "NOW Bill of Rights" that emphasized the need for legislation against sexism and its enforcement. The "NOW Bill of Rights" had ten sections that cover the Equal Rights Constitutional Amendment, the creation and enforcement of laws against discrimination, and basic rights for women. Half of the demands dealt with reproductive rights and maternity issues. The other half was legislative issues of sexism, education, anti-poverty, and public accommodations. The "NOW Bill of Rights" reflected the views and demands of the feminist community.

The demands that focused on the female body itself included issues on maternity leave rights in employment and in Social Security benefits, tax deduction for home and childcare expenses for working parents, childcare centers, the right of women to control their reproductive lives, and partnership marriages of equalized rights and shared responsibilities.<sup>17</sup> The first demand of maternity leave detailed that, after a reasonable amount of time for the mother to recover after birth, she could return to her job without the loss of seniority and benefits that she

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<sup>16</sup> Gwendolyn Mink and Barbara Smith, *Feminisms* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 195.

<sup>17</sup> National Organization for Women, *NOW Bill of Rights*. (Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1998), 553.

had before the maternity leave. The mother also had rights to a paid maternity leave as an employee benefit. This was to stop the negative connotations that were associated with pregnancy. A woman was now free to plan a family without worrying about losing her job in the process. Tax deductions for home and childcare expenses for working parents assisted couples who wanted a family and needed financial assistance to do so. This put less pressure on the parents to get second jobs in order to support the household. Another way to alleviate the pressure of childcare was to make public, as a park or a library, childcare centers. These centers were open to the entire community and would last from pre-school to high school ages. Public childcare centers would be a safe place for parents to entrust their children while they were working.

The last two demands that focused on the female body were reproductive rights and equality in marriage legislation. The NOW Bill of Rights demanded that females have complete access to reproductive rights, such as contraception and abortions. Laws prohibiting and limiting “access to contraceptive information and devices and laws governing abortion” should cease.<sup>18</sup> According to feminism, a woman should have control over her own body without the influence of the government. By having full access to contraceptives and abortions, women had control over their sexual lives. The demand for partnership marriages of equalized rights and shared responsibilities would assist women who entered the marriage state. Equalized rights would call for the revision of marriage, divorce, and family law. With this equalization of law came a deep sense of equal partnership in the married couple. Important legislation in protection of the women was the other half of the NOW Bill of Rights.

The final piece out of the Fourth Edition of *Issues in Feminism: An Introduction to*

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<sup>18</sup> National Organization for Women, *NOW Bill of Rights*. (Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1998), 554.



*Women's Studies* was a declaration made in 1977 at the First National Women's Conference in Houston, called "Declaration of American Women, 1977". This declaration was at the beginning of the piece *The Spirit of Houston*. In summation, it acknowledged the advancement of women in society as America has progressed. However, it also acknowledged that the advancement of women was not complete. Women still faced discrimination, "and those of us who are minority women ... must overcome the double burden of discrimination based on race and sex."<sup>19</sup> The declaration called upon the President and Congress to examine and evaluate their legislative proposals as seriously as the women who proposed them. This all inclusive nature of the declaration encompassed the diversity of the second wave of feminism. Women working together to better the condition of all women nationally was the backbone of the Feminist Movement of the 1970s.

Breaking down gender roles and dismantling what society expected of women was an important goal for the Feminist Movement. The traditional roles of women at the time were to go to school for education, but only until marriage. If a woman went to work, she traditionally worked as a secretary or a lower ranking job. Women were meant to be pretty and dress with the current fashion. Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique* preached on this very concept and encouraged activism from women trapped in this image. For many, *The Feminine Mystique* inspired the Feminist Movement and called women to arms against the patriarchy. Destroyed gender roles meant that the fight for equal rights would be easier and second nature.

The Feminist Movement of the 1970s was spearheaded by one of NOW's founding members, Betty Friedan. With her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan opened up the world to the prejudices and injustices that women faced. She demanded activism; she is the mother of the

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<sup>19</sup> Mim Kelber, *Declaration of American Women, 1977* (Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1998), 556.

second wave of feminism.

Betty Friedan was a prominent leader in the Feminist Movement who exemplified its ideals, but also its prejudices and paranoia. Friedan's life took numerous twists and turns making her a controversial figure. She was well educated and graduated from Smith College in 1942 with high marks. On campus she was seen as studious, bright, opinionated, and a woman that had great potential. She then married and settled down, becoming the epitome of a housewife. However, her education and marriage did not mix well. After some time she believed herself a failure due to the misuse of her college degree. With much thought she created a questionnaire for her fellow graduates at the 1957 reunion at Smith College. This questionnaire asked, "What do you wish you had done differently?", "How do you feel about getting older?" to "What problem have you had working out your role as a woman?"<sup>20</sup> While most of her classmates answered positively, Friedan noticed an underlying current of resentment. Her classmates wondered if they squandered their education by becoming housewives and suddenly Friedan was not alone. This questionnaire was the groundwork to the famous book, *The Feminine Mystique*, which inspired the Feminist Movement.

The creation and the implementation of *The Feminist Mystique* was a hard fought battle that had a lasting influence on Friedan and the Feminist Movement. *The Feminine Mystique* was a book that laid bare the heavy constraints that society held over women and how women should break the constraints for freedom. Friedan denounced the perfection of the life of a housewife. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan criticizes the restrictions that women face as housewives and as sexual partners. With this book, Friedan questioned a woman's entire being and individuality.<sup>21</sup> It was a tough sell to promote the book. Friedan went to many women's magazines with no

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<sup>20</sup> Judith Hennessee, *Betty Friedan: Her Life* (New York: Penguin Group, 1999), 71.

<sup>21</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 376.

success until she fired her agent and hired a new one. It did not occur to her, at the time, to create a woman's magazine all her own. Gloria Steinem, later described in detail as an activist, was a powerful feminist who started her own women's magazine in order to release feminist content into mainstream media. Friedan looked to constricting women's magazines that were already established. *Ladies Homes Journal* and *McCall's* published chapters of her book around the same time, January- March 1963, and the entire book came out on February 19, 1963. Friedan went on the road to promote her new book and was famous by the end of her tour due to the content of the book and the content of her character. With this book and the active campaigning, Betty Friedan became a prominent force within the Feminist Movement. *The Feminine Mystique* commented on the condition of women in society and reflected the trials that women often faced. A perfect example of the struggles of women that *The Feminine Mystique* addressed is *Woman in the Middle*.

In Florence Rush's article *Woman in the Middle*, she discussed the life of a middle aged woman who was "caught between two generations."<sup>22</sup> The two generations that Rush was caught between was that of her parents and then of her children. Her role of caretaker of the family confused Rush and led to high anxiety in her life. The sole burden of caring for and running a family made Rush question women's place in society. The Feminist Movement helped her answer the questions she asked herself all her life. At an early age she realized that her parents' marriage was broken. Rush's parents often fought and when she confessed her knowledge of their rocky marriage her parents looked to her to vent their problems. In the duration of the marriage, only Rush knew of the turmoil, her brother was oblivious because her parents did not confide any of their marital problems to him. In their old age her parents became ill and Rush was expected to look after them. Her family perceived Rush to be obsessive in her attentions to

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<sup>22</sup> Florence Rush, *Woman in the Middle* (New York: The New York Times Book Company, 1973), 42.

her parents and called her “neurotic” as a result. After her father’s passing Rush focused on her mother and then realized how her life was slowly slipping away. She was dedicating her life to her mother without creating a life of her own.

The second generation that Rush was caught between was her children. Her first child was a boy who seriously injured himself in college and took all of his frustration out on his mother during the recovery process. Rush described how she gave up her new found job to look after her son while he recovered. After his healing her other son was in trouble for not performing well in school. In order to spend more time and energy on her wayward son, Rush refused a job promotion. However, her career sacrifice did not help her son. Despite spending more money for him to go to a special school, he still failed all of his classes and he lost all motivation for education. Further, the school caused panic and anxiety for Rush, blaming her for her son’s errant condition. The last child, a daughter, prepped herself to take on the world after college but was rudely awakened to the prejudice of a single woman in the workplace, leaving her despondent.

The daughter traveled and experienced the country trying to find her niche, repeatedly fighting with Rush whenever she returned home from another failed adventure. Eventually the daughter realized her actions and found stable ground to build up her life and repair the relationship between herself and her mother. Throughout this process with her children, Rush’s husband appeared twice in the narrative. The first time was to travel to the eldest son’s college to retrieve him for recovery at home, and the second time, to say that he would not interfere between a mother and daughter dispute. However, *Woman in the Middle* was written from Rush’s perspective, therefore her husband may have been more involved in the family drama but in this case she only mentioned him twice within the article. This lack of interest in the people

and family around him made Rush wonder why it was up to the woman of the house to keep everyone happy and in check.

Rush wanted to understand why women were thought of as the caregivers of the family with the men having no expectations put upon them. She used the example of her husband's single sister who was the sole caretaker for their mother. Even when he wrote a check to help with finances, the mother refused and claimed that the sister would take care of her. This puzzled Rush. The woman was seen as a caretaker, but the man was not. Rush decided to ask a young feminist if she knew why this problem existed. The young woman responded, "examine how differently the sexes are raised by their parents."<sup>23</sup> As Rush examined her life, she realized that her parents confided in her and not her brother, and her husband's sister was forced to be the sole caretaker for their mother. Men were taught different responsibilities than the women. At the end of the article, Rush announced her independence by explaining that instead of carrying the burden of two generations, she now takes time for herself and encourages her fellow feminists to do the same. She credits her feminist sisters for supporting her in taking control of her life and ends it with advice: "sooner or later, the woman in the middle is you and me, and together we must find a way not to be crushed."<sup>24</sup>

This article, written in 1971, was the perfect example of the burdens that women felt they had to carry before they found the Feminist Movement. Rush did not understand why the burden of self-sacrifice was laid upon the women of the family, but she did see a pattern. Rush was not ignorant of the injustice around her. The Feminist Movement was not created to teach women how downtrodden they are in society but to give them the answers to the questions they had asked for so long. Rush understood that her situation and the situation of women around her was

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<sup>23</sup> Florence Rush, *Woman in the Middle* (New York: The New York Times Book Company, 1973), 45.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

wrong, but could not define it. It was because of her association with feminists that Rush finally understood and could identify where the injustice came from. Women understood where their position was in society, but not why and that is what the Feminist Movement answered. The Feminist Movement of the 1970s was about figuring out and addressing the problems that women faced within society, and that women knew they were not alone in their struggles and their desire to have more freedom in the home and in society as a whole.

In Germaine Greer's section "Family", from *The Female Eunuch*, she talked about the deterioration of the family unit. She started with describing the story of Adam and Eve. Adam provided while Eve was the vessel to Adam's wants. Eventually they had children once their father figure cast them out of the garden for misbehaving. These children fought and killed for the love of the father and the one other woman in the narrative, Lilith, who was described as the destructive woman, was a temptress.<sup>25</sup> Women were condemned to sinning and tempting men. To Greer this was not the best example of a nuclear family, despite Christianity's claims to the contrary. The concept of the nuclear family, according to Greer, was unstable and short lived. Instead she preferred group living, something she experienced in Southern Italy. Collective families supported each other with food, supplies, and counsel. Everyone had a job and everyone contributed to raising the children, which made the children more rounded in character and pleasantness.<sup>26</sup>

According to Greer, the nuclear family supported itself on the bane of the mother. Meaning that the nuclear family rested on the sacrifice of the mother's individuality and self. After securing the wife into the home for assurance of monogamy,<sup>27</sup> the husband left to work.

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<sup>25</sup> Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1970), 216.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 218-219.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

The wife had to stay at home alone unless she was “bred”<sup>28</sup>, meaning that she produced children, more so male children. The isolation grated on the nerves of the wives and mothers but there was no escape. The children produced out of the marriage learned to manipulate the mother. Greer insisted that there was no love between a child and mother in a nuclear family because of the restrictions the mother had and the isolation she shared with the child.<sup>29</sup> This codependent relationship intensified when the child or children went to school. There the child learned to pin the school and mother against each other. The school enforced autonomy from the mother, while the mother demanded intervention for the child. This nasty cycle continued until the child left the home for independent groups of peers, in similar situations. Meanwhile, the father came home every day to recharge enough to go back to work the following day; he was oblivious, consciously or unconsciously to the wife’s plight.

This disregard that the mother and father grow towards each other is taught at an early age. Greer quotes a young man who desperately wished to stay single as long as possible. He truly believed that “having a girl ties you down” or “the more you got out with a girl, the more involved you get.”<sup>30</sup> The nuclear family restricted everyone, as was shown by the boy’s claims. Even though the nuclear family was the ideal during the 1960s,<sup>31</sup> it soon became apparent that it had its major flaws. It was flawed in that it encouraged isolation and hatred between members of the family. The mother was left alone with the children, the children were left alone in school, and the father was alone at work. However, what Greer failed to consider was choice. When the woman and the man in a nuclear family have the choice of staying at home with the children or working, or even both, then the forced isolation does not exist. Hatred between family members

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<sup>28</sup> Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1970), 218.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 220-222.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 220

was not a new phenomenon, no matter the family structure, and Greer's insistence that it was the nuclear family that created hatred was overreaching. While the nuclear family had its flaws and restrictions it did not actively create hatred within family members. If Greer had argued tensions within the family structure, and not hatred, then her argument would not sound as harsh or judgmental. Instead, Greer sustained that the nuclear family was poisonous and a problem within society.

The solution to the nuclear problem, in Greer's opinion, was a stem family or a collective. After her experience in Southern Italy, Greer believed that the traditional stem family was the best way to live and raise children. The stem family has a head of the family, always the oldest male alive, and then each person has a job. In medieval times the unmarried women would sew, while the married women with older children would cook.<sup>32</sup> Aunts and uncles, grandparents and neighbors would all interact with the children and work together to provide for the group. Goods were exchanged for time and work or visa versa. Greer acknowledged that the stem system was the most satisfying system for all involved. Although stem families were organized around a patriarch, Greer believed that the stem families she suggested would not be ruled by the eldest male. In her document she greatly deemphasized the role of the patriarch. To Greer, a stem family created a community to depend on and there was no isolation.

The example of the medieval family for Greer's argument in favor of the stem family is oddly out of place. Greer wrote her argument in the 1970s and she decided to use a medieval model over a more modern model. While she did say that her inspiration was from her personal experience it seemed that she had little other more modern examples. The concept of having multiple guardians organizing themselves to watch over the children of the family is unrealistic for every single family. Greer's stem family practice is a luxury that many families do not have

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<sup>32</sup> Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1970), 218.



and is naive. Families, no matter the structure, will always have some tensions and hatred. The one concept to be taken from Greer's argument is a positive support system for family members.

This support system was exemplified in the Feminist Movement of the 1970s. Women gathered to help other women out. Greer demanded this collective atmosphere because it meant communication between people. In Rush's case she benefitted from association with the feminists, their supportive atmosphere led to her finding a better life for herself. In that life she was happier and more self-reliant. After the isolation of the 1960s, women welcomed the support of other women.

## **Lesbianism**

The Stonewall Riots were the cornerstone of the Gay Liberation Movement of the 1970s. Raids on gay bars were common in the 1960s. However, when police raided the Stonewall gay bar on June 28, 1969, the crowds did not disperse as normal. A mayoral campaign that year raised the amount of police raids on gay bars in New York City. This was to show how the local candidate, John Lindsay, dealt with vice situations. The raid on the Stonewall gay bar was the third that week in Greenwich Village. The patrons of the bar, homosexuals and transvestites, began a riot and in the end four police officers were injured.<sup>33</sup> This riot inspired the Gay Liberation Movement of the 1970s and a call for social justice.

A similar situation happened in Buffalo in the same year as the Stonewall Riots. Approximately, three years earlier, about 1966, the last gay bar in Buffalo was shut down. After this three year drought a gay man<sup>34</sup> requested a restaurant license. He was refused based on his

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<sup>33</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 194.

<sup>34</sup> Name unknown.

sexual orientation.<sup>35</sup> This enraged the gay community of Buffalo and inspired them to gather together under one society. The process of creating such a society eluded the community so they asked Franklin Kameny, the President of the Mattachine in Washington, D.C. at the time, to come to Buffalo. The Mattachine Society in Washington was a society created for and by the gay community. With Kameny's help the gay community of Buffalo created the Mattachine Society, named in honor of Kameny and his contributions. The Mattachine Society's goal was "to form an organization for the social, educational and political benefit of gay people".<sup>36</sup>

The gay community of Buffalo struggled with organization in the first few days. This was their first attempt at such a large endeavor and expected some setbacks. The most important setback was the location of the Mattachine Society. Its Gay Community Center was around the corner from City Hall and the Police Department Headquarters. This resulted in countless raids. The last raid on the Society, in that location, resulted in the serious injury of a lesbian member. She was epileptic and during the raid, had a seizure. The police would not allow the members of the Mattachine Society to come to her aid. As a result, she had to have a permanent neck brace from the injuries sustained in the incident.<sup>37</sup> Mattachine decided to move their location in order to survive in Buffalo. The Mattachine Society moved their meetings and services to the Unitarian Church.

Eventually, on February 1, 1973, the Mattachine Society opened up Buffalo's first Gay Community Services Center. This center provided a meeting place for the society, health services, and social events for the gay community. This center burned down on the evening of Friday March 23, 1973. There were rumors of arson but those rumors were laid to rest in the

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<sup>35</sup> *Mattachine Society: A Brief History* (Buffalo). The year and publisher are unknown but most likely written between 1973-1977 due to the design of the print and its location within the archives. Box 3, Folder 9.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

newsletter Fifth Freedom. The Fifth Freedom was the newsletter for the Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier Gay Community. The August 19, 1973 newsletter explained the reason for the fire that burnt down the previous Gay Community Center. The cause of the fire, determined by the City of Buffalo Fire Department, was “overloading the electrical circuit on the second floor of the building.”<sup>38</sup> The Mattachine Society then moved to office spaces on Allen St. until a new facility could be found. After an extensive search the society found a new center, which provided a much needed space for the gay community.

The services that the Gay Community Center provided were educational, health oriented, and social. The Mattachine Society ran the Center and provided these services. Educational services included: contributing to articles in the Buffalo New Times<sup>39</sup>, having question and answer sessions with local judges<sup>40</sup>, and polling the Buffalo community to fight against discrimination<sup>41</sup>. This meant that questionnaires were sent to local businesses. Depending on the response, the Mattachine Society would visit the businesses to ensure non-discrimination (positive response to questionnaire) or send two advocates to discuss the discriminatory policies (negative response). The Gay Community Center offered counseling and therapy sessions for closeted homosexuals, openly gay persons, and those who were not sure of their sexual orientation. There were also outside resources, as claimed, “Many mutual assistance ties are developing with mental health, medical and legal organizations here in Buffalo. They are realizing that we can be as much help to them as they can be to us”.<sup>42</sup> For social events, the Mattachine Society often held dances and coffee house forums.<sup>43</sup> The Mattachine Society focused on the whole gay community, not just lesbians.

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<sup>38</sup> “Fire Facts,” *The Fifth Freedom* Volume 3, no. 11 (1973), 9. Box 1, Folder 2.

<sup>39</sup> Greg Bodekor, “Progress Report,” *The Fifth Freedom* Volume 3, no. 15 (1973), 5-6. Box 1, Folder 2.

<sup>40</sup> “Mattina Talks with Mattachine,” *The Fifth Freedom* Volume 4, no. 3 (1974), 5. Box 1, Folder 3.

<sup>41</sup> “Mattachine Tackles Discrimination,” *The Fifth Freedom* Volume 4, no. 3 (1974), 9. Box 1, Folder 3.

<sup>42</sup> Greg Bodekor, “Progress Report,” *The Fifth Freedom* Volume 3, no. 15 (1973), 5-6. Box 1, Folder 2.

<sup>43</sup> *The Fifth Freedom* Volume 4, no. 1 (1974), 10-11. Box 1, Folder 3.

The Stonewall Riots were similar to the Buffalo riots in that they united the gay community. There were not many lesbians that night at Stonewall.<sup>44</sup> The lesbians that were a part of the riots were working-class. Middle-class lesbians did not attend bars to meet other lesbians, working-class lesbians did<sup>45</sup>. These working-class lesbians fought in the riots after years of pent-up frustrations with raids on the local bars. Just like in Buffalo, gay bars in New York City and across the nation were raided for supposed liquor infractions. This constant abuse and the fear of hiding swelled the night of the riots and manifested into a form of violence. Despite the lack of political aim that the riots had, lesbians used the Stonewall Rebellion as a symbol for the Gay Liberation Movement.

The new generation of lesbians in the Gay Liberation Movement transcended class due to the social changes of the 1960s. The lesbians in the movement were young, college educated women. These women came from diverse backgrounds, including working-class and middle-class. The democratization of higher education in the 1960s created a variety of classes in the college system. Lesbians of all classes in the college system united in one front to protect the rights of homosexuals.

This left a gap between the younger and older generation of lesbians; “[the younger generations] were generally comfortable with language and ideas and knew how to organize as working-class lesbians of the previous generation did not, and they were confident that they should have rights no less than any other Americans, as middle-class lesbians of the previous generation were not.”<sup>46</sup> The older generation split into different classes while the younger college generation had a mixture of classes. This difference created rifts between the generations of

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<sup>44</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 195.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

activists.

As the younger generations became more militant in their approach to the gay liberation cause, they turned away from traditional lesbian organizations, such as the Daughters Of Bilitis, or the D.O.B, and Mattachine.<sup>47</sup> Mattachine, started in 1950, was originally a male homosexual organization but soon reached out to female homosexuals. D.O.B. was created in the same area as the Mattachine and around the same time, but its founders, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, did not know about the existence of Mattachine. This lack of communication hurt the older organizations. The oldest lesbian organization, the D.O.B., soon lost the younger generation of activists because of the shift of attitudes.<sup>48</sup> Newspapers and magazines supported by the D.O.B. either shut down or broke off from the main group in the early 1970s. Lesbian feminists turned to the newer and more radical media that addressed their needs.<sup>49</sup> This media became increasingly available as time went on, making it easier for young lesbians to leave the older generation behind. Buffalo's lesbian community's response to the shift in generation focus was GROW, or Gay Rights for Older Women. GROW often worked with Sisters of Sappho, another Buffalo Lesbian organization. GROW outlived the Sisters of Sappho, but despite the loss, they still supported the elder lesbian community in Buffalo.<sup>50</sup>

The lesbian community in Buffalo, New York thrived long before the Feminist Movement of the 1970s. In *Boots of Leather and Slippers of Gold*, Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Kennedy interviewed lesbians from Buffalo with the purpose to record and understand the history of lesbians within the Buffalo community. Madeline Davis was and is a prominent member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community. *Boots of Leather*

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<sup>47</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 193.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 196-197.

<sup>50</sup> Pattie Yarger, "A Lesbian's View of Buffalo," *The Fifth Freedom* 8, no. 1 (1978): 5. Box 1, Folder 7.

*and Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* was the summation of years of hard work and dedication to the lesbian community, specifically in Buffalo, New York. Davis did not start out as an activist, she was an artist who studied at the University of Buffalo.<sup>51</sup> In 1972, Davis had her political debut at the Democratic Convention in Miami. She introduced herself as an elected delegate, then a woman, and then a lesbian. In her speech she urged a Gay Rights Plank for the Democratic Party. Davis was the first openly lesbian elected delegate to a national political convention.<sup>52</sup> She then went on to teach the first college course on lesbianism at the University of Buffalo. In 1973, “she served as President of the Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier,” where she also served as a librarian.<sup>53</sup> Madeline Davis was the only woman who served as the President of the Mattachine Society during the 1970s.

In Davis’ acceptance speech for an award given to her by the Empire State Pride Association, she mentioned Carol Speser, another prominent activist in Buffalo. Davis fondly said, “Recently Carol Speser and I were talking about our years of activism. She said that, although we can see other people’s lives improve over time, we never think that we might experience personal rewards in our own lives. Not awards and congratulations, which are wonderful, but real life blessings.”<sup>54</sup> Davis is still a prominent activist for the LGBT community in Buffalo. She tours five times a year to speak publicly. Davis’ marriage to her partner Wendy was the first Jewish lesbian wedding in Buffalo in 1995.<sup>55</sup> She and her wife live comfortably in their home in Buffalo, New York.

The beginning of *Boots of Leather and Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian*

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<sup>51</sup> Mark Singer. “Platform.” *The New Yorker*, 88 no.24 (August 13, 2012): 30.  
<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?> (accessed May 9, 2014).

<sup>52</sup> *Madeline Davis*. Buffalo: Empire State Pride Agenda Foundation, 2004. Box 81, Folder 9.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Madeline Davis, “Speech” (speech Buffalo, New York, April 5, 2004), Madeline Davis GLBT Archives of Western New York. Box 3, Folder 9.

<sup>55</sup> *Madeline Davis*. Buffalo: Empire State Pride Agenda Foundation, 2004. Box 81, Folder 9.

*Community*, began when Davis and Elizabeth Kennedy co-founded The Buffalo Women's Oral History Project.<sup>56</sup> This was during the second wave of feminism and the Gay Liberation Movement. Davis and Kennedy desired to have a collection of interviews of older lesbians in order to preserve the history of the lesbian community in Buffalo. Davis and Kennedy reveled in the opportunity to research a new subject that was highly connected to themselves and the cause. These interviews transformed into their book, *Boots of Leather and Slippers of Gold*. Its content contained the oral history of lesbians that lived in the Buffalo community from 1930-1960. The historical book gained national press and received a Lambda Literary Award.<sup>57</sup> The non-biased literature on the lesbian and gay communities was limited at the time.

Most of the literature about the gay and lesbian community up until 1973 had been about their mental status. The desire for ethical treatment came from the history of homosexual research. Researchers studied only mental patients when examining about homosexuality. Davis and Kennedy chose to research the lesbian community of Buffalo, New York because they desired ethical treatment on the subject of homosexuality and its usefulness for future generations to learn from and understand.

According to Davis and Kennedy the predominant culture of the lesbian community in Buffalo New York revolved around the roles of the Butch and Femme. Relationships between lesbians were defined in Butch and Femme, in that both aspects had to be prevalent in individual relationships. Butches took on a more masculine role and wore pants, they were in charge and the protectors of the Femme who dressed in more feminine clothing and took on the more feminine role of the relationship. This separation of gender roles brought criticism from the Feminist Movement of the 1970s. When the second wave of feminism began to gain popularity

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<sup>56</sup> Madeline Davis. Buffalo: Empire State Pride Agenda Foundation, 2004. Box 81, Folder 9.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

the Butches and Femmes were very interested in feminist ideas despite the criticisms.

The prevalent thought of the time was that homosexuality was a mental illness.<sup>58</sup> Lesbians could not stop being homosexuals but they could improve their lives as women. This opportunity of overall gender improvement gained the attention of the Butch and Femme community. The feminists believed that the Butches wanted to be males, and in that disregarded the pleasure of being female. Often, there was tension between the Butches and Femmes over power, the Butches would be too forceful and possessive of the Femmes, who just wanted a strong partner, not an oppressor.<sup>59</sup> When the Feminist Movement addressed the gender roles of society and the injustice of females, the lesbian community understood.<sup>60</sup> When the roles of females in society changed, the Butches and Femmes changed as well, most of the time for the better. They changed in that they better understood their roles in society and that they could overcome the prejudices of homosexuality. As Davis and Kennedy said, “The instability created by the contradictory power dynamics between Butch and Femme might be part of the reason for the avid interest of some of these Butch-Femme couples in the Feminist Movement of the 1970s. Its critique of gender offered insight into an ongoing, and often troublesome, issue in their lives.”

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Lesbians tried to support both the Gay Liberation Movement and the Feminist Movement with some sacrifices. While the Gay Liberation Movement fought for the acceptance of homosexuality it mainly focused on gay men and while the Feminist Movement fought for the equality of women it mainly focused on straight women.<sup>62</sup> This clash confused many lesbians.

<sup>58</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 196.

<sup>59</sup> Davis, Madeline and Kennedy, Elizabeth. *Boots of Leather and Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*, (New York: Routledge Incorporated, 1993), 282.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> “Lesbian Feminists Meet,” *The Fifth Freedom* 5, no. 1 and 2 (1975): 19. Box 1, Folder 4.



As a result, lesbians often struggled between the Gay Liberation Movement and the Feminist Movement.

The working class lesbian community of Buffalo grew more with the rise of feminism. While the largest growth of the community happened during the 1940s<sup>63</sup>, when the men were off to war, the understanding and the acceptance of lesbians increased during the 1970s. Women who came out as lesbian before the second wave of feminism fought hard for their ability to participate safely in the lesbian community. Being lesbian was dangerous but openly participating in the lesbian community was lethal. Many were beaten, raped, and killed for coming out. Butches were known to often get into fist fights with men in order to protect their turf. It was a long and hard fought battle to gain the area of developing a gay community in Buffalo.

When feminism took form in Buffalo, the activism against violence towards women increased. Davis and Kennedy succeeded in gaining the unique perspective of a generation of lesbians who physically had to defend their culture. There were mentions of the hope the Feminist Movement provided for the lesbian community. The concept that women were equal to men and deserved the right to own that status connected with the lesbian community. The early feminists did not accept the lesbian community in Buffalo, but the lesbian community was very open to the ideals and activities of the Feminist Movement.

*Boots of Leather and Slippers of Gold* focused on the previous history of the working class lesbian community in Buffalo, New York but ended before the second wave of feminism. This was purposely done to illuminate the history of the older lesbians in the community and their struggles to survive. Davis and Kennedy's research created a cornerstone for the

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<sup>63</sup> Vern Bullough. *When Did the Gay Rights Movement Begin?*, 18 April 2005. History News Network, George Mason University. 3 March 2009.

development of the relationship between the lesbian and feminist community.

In the book, *The Lesbian Community*, the consciousness of the lesbian community and the need to form groups occurred long before the formal start of the Feminist Movement of the 1970s. Deborah Goleman Wolf focused mainly on the groups in California in her book but these groups are relevant to the general discussion. Much of her research correlated with that of Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Kennedy in Buffalo, New York. The second chapter of Wolf's book focused on the socio-historical background of the lesbian community. As the community evolved over time, it met with the Feminist Movement in the 1970s. Together the movements grew and improved upon each other.

Wolf detailed how, historically, lesbianism was not accepted as a sexuality. While society never fully accepted female or male homosexuality, Wolf mainly focused on lesbianism. She noted that the Golden Age for lesbianism was the age of Sappho of Lesbos, the poet. Symbols of the Mother Goddess and female power created a strong environment for lesbians.<sup>64</sup> The next stage of history where lesbianism stood out was during the 1300-1700s. Witch-hunts and female healers were suspected to be lesbians or just accused of the unnatural act, whether they were lesbians or not. The third stage occurred after the Victorian era, where women of high status could label themselves as lesbians or bisexuals and still have social mobility. That stage favored the upper class because money brings freedom. Those women of lower status contended with oppression, a "sickness", and fear of discovery. Society believed lesbianism to be a disease and the self-realization of being a lesbian did not stop this belief. Many lesbians truly believed that they were "sick" and sinful. This sinfulness stemmed not only from social pressure but, also, from religious belief systems.

Religion and psychology played an important role in undermining the acceptance of

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<sup>64</sup> Deborah Goleman Wolf, *The Lesbian Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 25.

lesbianism. Wolf explained, in the Christian religions, the purpose of sex is to procreate but only in the sanctity of marriage. The act of sex between two women does not create a child ergo the act of homosexual intercourse is sinful. The Christian religions also associated homosexuality with paganism. These two factors, lack of procreation and association with paganism, developed from the ancient tribe of the Hebrews. The Hebrews were a small tribe of monotheists in a polytheistic world. They needed to procreate and disconnect from paganism in order to survive; thus, homosexuality became sinful. This belief survived into Christianity and modern day. It was because of this sinfulness that Wolf claimed that many lesbians did not have a form of established religion.<sup>65</sup>

Wolf wrote the section on religion in 1979; however, Buffalo already had an answer to this lack of “established religion” problem in the form of DIGNITY/BUFFALO. In 1969, ten years before Wolf’s publication, Father Patrick X. Nidorf, O.S.A., an Augustinian priest and psychologist started the organization Dignity. He wanted to reach out to the Catholics who were struggling with their religious and sexual identities. Therefore, he created Dignity whose mission statement was,

“We believe that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Catholics in our diversity are members of Christ’s mystical body, numbered among the People of God. We have an inherent dignity because God created us, Christ died for us, and the Holy Spirit sanctified us in Baptism, making us temples of the Spirit, and channels through which God’s love becomes visible. Because of this, it is our right, our privilege, and our duty to live the sacramental life of the Church, so that we might become more powerful instruments of God’s love working among all people.

We believe that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons can express their sexuality in a manner that is consonant with Christ’s teaching. We believe that we can express our sexuality physically, in a unitive manner that is loving, life-giving, and life-affirming. We believe that all sexuality should be exercised in an ethically responsible and unselfish way.

DIGNITY is organized to unite gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Catholics, as well as our families, friends and loved ones in order to develop leadership, and be an instrument through which we may be heard by and promote reform in the Church.”<sup>66</sup>

This organization reached out to all homosexuals of the Catholic faith. Rochester, New York established their chapter in 1975 and combined it with Integrity Inc., which was an

<sup>65</sup> Deborah Goleman Wolf, *The Lesbian Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 27.

<sup>66</sup> “Statement of Position and Purpose.” DignityUSA. <http://www.dignityusa.org/purpose> (accessed June 5, 2014).

episcopal organization for homosexuals. The president of Rochester's organization, Kevin Seahill, invited Buffalo's gay community to start their own chapter. In October 1976, DIGNITY/BUFFALO was formed. This created a safe environment for religious homosexuals in the Buffalo community. DIGNITY/BUFFALO often worked with and advertised in *The Fifth Freedom*. While Wolf was correct in that a lack of established religion hurt the lesbian community she did not take into consideration the religious organizations that pre-existed for those purposes.

Established religion was a pillar of strength and guidance for groups of people and not having that community hurt religious lesbians. The choices of rejecting religion or practicing it but in closeted conditions, were the only options for religious lesbians. This rejection from religion was a negative factor in the self-realization of a lesbian. Psychology was a second negative coming out factor for lesbians. Unlike religion, psychology did not view homosexuality as a sin but rather a sickness. The sickness of homosexuality was curable. The methods used to cure patients of their sickness were often violent bordering on torture. As more and more homosexuals appeared on paper as non-mental patients, psychology changed its view on homosexuality. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Organization removed homosexuality as a mental disorder. Currently, homosexuality is another facet of human sexuality in the world of psychology. Religion and psychology were part of the negative effects of coming out as a lesbian and they influenced the law and legislation against homosexuality.

The law and legislation written against homosexuality changed its views over time, like psychology.<sup>67</sup> The church and state were one entity during the Middle Ages, when the laws were written, and were influential for current policies in the United States. Laws from the Middle Ages were so influential was because the English common law was based off of Middle Age

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<sup>67</sup> Deborah Goleman Wolf, *The Lesbian Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 29.

ideologies, and the United States relied heavily on the guidance of the English common law.<sup>68</sup> This created a moral code based on Christianity, a religion that did not accept homosexuality. As time advanced, the United States of America adapted these laws to their new country.<sup>69</sup> In the United States of America the church and state are not one, but two separate entities. This separation did not affect the anti-homosexual laws until the popularity of the Gay Liberation Movement of the 1970s. These laws mainly pertained to male homosexuals but as knowledge of female homosexuality grew so did the extent of the laws. With the rise of the Gay Liberation Movement the legislation against homosexuals changed. As Wolf said, “in 1962, Illinois became the first state to make adult consensual homosexuality legal. By 1976, sixteen states had such laws...”<sup>70</sup> The rise of the Gay Liberation Movement changed the awareness of gay rights and therefore, the legislation against homosexuality. This did not completely end the struggles that homosexuals faced in society.

“The Old Gay Life” as Wolf put it, encompassed decades before the Gay Liberation Movement in the 1970s. Wolf described three different stages of the lesbian community “(1) ‘old gay life,’ (2) norm-oriented self-help organizations of the 1950s, and (3) the developing community built on lesbian feminist principles.”<sup>71</sup> Much like in *Boots of Leather and Slippers of Gold*, the lesbian community kept itself to the bar scene and private parties. Working-class lesbians were torn between bars and private parties because bars were a public hangout with the threat of discovery; private parties were safer but hidden. Private parties were usually held by lesbians of higher class, creating classism within the lesbian community. The black lesbian community met in private parties a majority of the time because not all gay bars were integrated.

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<sup>68</sup> Deborah Goleman Wolf, *The Lesbian Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 29.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 23.

Bars were a public place for hook-ups and social interaction amongst the lesbian community members. It was also in these bars that the Butch and Femme stereotype was predominant. Where lesbians gathered to meet other lesbians depended on their social class.

Carol Speser was and is a prominent activist in the Buffalo community. Her activism began in the 1960s with the Anti-War Movement and then she transferred over to the Feminist Movement. Most of her activist skills she learned in the Anti-War Movement, such as organization and molotov cocktail making.<sup>72</sup> She founded and co-founded many organizations in her career such as, The Counseling Referral Service for Women<sup>73</sup>, SHADES<sup>74</sup>, the local Stonewall Democrats, and Rainbow Spirit Rising.<sup>75</sup> During the 1970s, she was on the board of the local NOW chapter. Speser organized the first outdoor pride celebration in Buffalo, New York.<sup>76</sup> Currently Speser is a chaplain for same-sex marriages and married the first same-sex couple to legally wed in New York.<sup>77</sup> In May 2014, she was “Honored by Visit Buffalo Niagara as the 2014 Buffalo Ambassador of the Year”.<sup>78</sup>

In a three-hour long interview Speser explained her past experiences, her drive to be a positive and active influence in the Buffalo community, and how the Buffalo community forged strong bonds between its members that no prejudice could hinder. Speser took the time to answer questions ranging from the problem of acceptance for lesbians in the Buffalo community, to the projects that she helped orchestrate with NOW and other feminist organizations. The first of the

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<sup>72</sup> Carol Speser, Interview by author, February 20, 2014.

<sup>73</sup> *Directory for Therapists*. Buffalo & Erie County, New York: The Counseling Referral Service for Women., 1997.

<sup>74</sup> New York, Buffalo. Madeline Davis GLBT Archives of Western New York. *Accession Form, SHADES*. Date received, 2002. Box 48, Folder 25.

<sup>75</sup> “Carol Speser: Activist/Chaplain.” *Art Voice*, August 4, 2011, [http://artvoice.com/issues/v10n31/five\\_questions](http://artvoice.com/issues/v10n31/five_questions) (accessed May 9, 2014).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> “Carol Speser,” *Visit Buffalo / Niagara*, Accessed May 9, 2014. <http://www.visitbuffaloniagara.com/listings/?action=display&listingID=12472>.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

questions had to deal with the perception of lesbians in the hetero and homosexual community.

The popularity of the Feminist Movement in the 1970s was due to the excitement of the 1960s where social justice movements were dominant in the media. The Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-War Movement of the 1960s inspired many women to join the ever growing Feminist Movement. Speser joined the feminist movement out of her active participation in the Anti-War Movement. After establishing a sense of rights for women, Speser entered the Gay Liberation Movement. As Heather Koeppel, a lesbian from Buffalo, said, “We can not be liberated as lesbians without first being liberated as women.”<sup>79</sup> It was a sense of rolling activism. One movement bled into another movement and so on. With each movement the members evolved, because they made connections to other movements, which encouraged alliances. These alliances aided each movement towards their own personal goals.

Speser became an activist in the Feminist and Gay Liberation Movement due to her past experiences. Even though she grew up acting “straight” she understood that she was attracted more to females. After learning that homosexuality was regarded as a major mental illness, she decided to keep quiet. This had fatal results. Speser lost a longtime friend and boyfriend to the prejudices of the society that they lived in during the 1960s. After confessing to each other that they were homosexuals, her friend went to see a psychologist. Instead of the acceptance and understanding that is more common in today’s society, the friend was met with a twenty year psychiatric prescription in order to cure his homosexuality. This meant that it would take twenty years of therapy to cure his and her homosexuality. The lack of acceptance and knowledge of homosexuality led to Speser and her friend making a suicide pact. Speser survived the tragedy and the memory of her friend gave her motivation to fight for gay rights. She fought and still

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<sup>79</sup> Heather Koeppel, “Do Gay Men Rape Lesbians? Or Sexism: An Obstacle to Gay Unity.” *The Fifth Freedom* 5, no. 5 (1975): 11. Box 1, Folder 4.

fights for the rights of homosexuals so they know that they are not alone or wrong in their sexuality.

When Speser was found alive after her suicide attempt, she was placed in a mental institution for treatment of homosexuality. A psychologist told Speser's friend that it took about twenty years to cure homosexuality; however, she was only in the facility for a couple of years. The few years that she was inside the facility were filled with torturous actions towards Speser, being wrapped in sheets and having ice poured on her as an example. This treatment did not "cure" her. After experiencing a violent night terror, Speser heard a voice that inspired her to pretend to get better so she could get out of the facility. It worked and Speser gained her freedom, but that did not improve her opinion on sexuality, as she still had to go to a psychologist for treatment for her 'disease.'

After being released from the facility, Speser went back to college<sup>80</sup> to finish her degree and also joined Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). This was an Anti-War Movement that was popular on college campuses in the 1960s and 70s. Participating in this form of activism enabled Speser to transfer her energy to the Feminist and Gay Liberation Movements. Before she could go to these movements she had to accept herself and her homosexuality. The spark that introduced Speser to the acceptance of the feminist and lesbian community came when she saw an advertisement for female counseling by females and for females.

The Feminist Counseling collective had an advertisement in a periodical in the student union of Speser's college. The advertisement intrigued Speser and she wanted to try it. Her psychologist at the time laughed and mocked her out of the office, promising that she would come back to him. His reaction did not inspire confidence but she still went. The collective owned an old house and practiced out of it, so Speser waited in what used to be the living room

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<sup>80</sup> The exact college was not discussed in the interview, but it was out of New York State.



of the home. Despite her doubts and her old psychologist's ridicule, the female psychologist had an immense and positive impact on Speser. She attributes Dr. B with saving her life. Dr. B was a psychologist that was relaxed and extremely accepting. The doctor referred Speser to the book *Lesbian/Woman* by Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin. *Lesbian/Woman* was a popular book that explained not only the reality of lesbians but refuted the negative stereotypes. This book was a guide into and the acceptance of lesbian life. Instead of trying to cure Speser, Dr. B accepted her and referred her to literature to help her better understand herself. This is what saved Speser's life and inspired her into advocating for access to mental health.

Speser joined NOW after returning to Buffalo, her hometown, and she realized that she did not know any activists. One of the most memorable moments was when she received the membership form for the NOW chapter of Buffalo. On the form was the option to check whether or not she was a lesbian. This was after the lesbian community converged on the NOW conference and demanded that lesbian struggles be a feminist issue. When NOW accepted openly active lesbians into the organization, it even changed the membership form. Speser checked the box despite her reservations. Mainly she questioned the definition of a lesbian; did she fit the criteria? She had never slept with a woman before, but Speser knew that she was attracted to women. This minor detail solved itself during a small discussion among some members of NOW.

## **Classism**

Despite the movement's ideal of non-gender roles, equal rights through legality, and women to women support, feminists were not all inclusive. One of the biggest arguments against

the Feminist Movement of the 1970s, made by feminist media and lesbians<sup>81</sup>, was that it was a movement created for and by white middle-class women. Although feminists attempted to include all types of diversity, they failed. Feminism addressed problems with women but they failed to address the added problems of women of color, women of different classes, and lesbians.<sup>82</sup> Where white women protested against a certain wage gap, women of color protested against a wider wage gap.

The National Organization of Women or NOW began in order to impress and appeal to those in power and consisted of middle-class leaders and activists. Friedan and the other founders created NOW before the Feminist Movement of the 1970s began and it reflected in their actions. NOW focused on persuading people in power towards women's rights and legislation. It was first and foremost a lobby group for Congress. Later on, NOW grew to encompass many sides of the Feminist Movement. NOW grew from the "elite groups that knew how to get things done" to "a mass organization" in order to encompass the wave of young radical feminists.<sup>83</sup> As NOW grew, new organizations emerged and broke off, such as WEAL (Women's Equity Action League) that focused on employment and education for women. Although NOW developed into a mass organization, its main focus remained on the legal issues that women faced, mainly discrimination laws.

Legislation was vital to the Feminist Movement because it created legal protection against discrimination based on sex. Having legal protection created the opportunity for lawsuits and a change in society's view about appropriate behavior. The first demand of the legislative half of the NOW Bill of Rights was the passing and ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, or ERA. It proved that the "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by

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<sup>81</sup> "MSing Persons: Gay," *The Fifth Freedom* 5, no. 9 (1975): 16. Box 1, Folder 4.

<sup>82</sup> "Sisters of Sappho Lesbian Feminist," *The Fifth Freedom* 5, no. 10 (1975): 3. Box 1, Folder 4.

<sup>83</sup> Judith Hennessee, *Betty Friedan: Her Life* (New York: Penguin Group, 1999), 104.

the United States or by any State on account of sex.”<sup>84</sup> Amendments must be passed by Congress and then ratified by the states in order to activate their legal standing. Congress eventually passed ERA, but the states did not ratify it in a majority. Feminists are still fighting for the ratification of ERA across the states. The second legislative demand was the enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 under Title VII. In the demand, the tensions between the Civil Rights Movement and the Feminist Movement were evident. Sacks’ descriptions of tensions between groups of a movement come to mind when NOW demanded “that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission enforces the prohibitions against sex discrimination in employment ... with the same vigor as it enforces the prohibitions against racial discrimination.”<sup>85</sup> NOW also demanded that Title II of the Civil Rights Amendment include public accommodation and housing. The other two demands of legislative nature promoted the livelihood of women.

In order for women to succeed in life on their own volition, the NOW Bill of Rights demanded reform in the legislation on education and anti-poverty. Rising through the class system required access to education otherwise not available to the lower classes. Education led to job opportunities and to a better standard of living. When NOW demanded equality in the education system, on all levels, they wanted an opportunity for women to compete with men in the job market. Those women who were impoverished also demanded equality in job training and federal financial assistance.

Reform on anti-poverty legislation would mean that men and women were equal in job training, housing, and federal assistance. The National Organization for Women Bill of Rights demanded equality for women for a higher standard of living. Legislation and assistance from the federal and state governments guaranteed that a woman in need did not need to fear

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<sup>84</sup> National Organization for Women, *NOW Bill of Rights*. (Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1998), 553.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

discrimination when searching for assistance. The legislation, if it had passed, would have helped to diminish the gap between the social classes. The large difference between middle-class feminism and working-class feminism remained the same.

Working-class feminism, according to Dana Frank's article *Working-Class Feminism*, was different from the middle-class view of feminism in that survival, not equality, was the main objective.<sup>86</sup> The Feminist Movement of the 1970s fought for equal rights and treatment for women. Working-class and middle-class women were feminists long before the 1970s. Working-class feminism began in the era of the Industrial Revolution, fighting for equal treatment in the factories. Unlike the first and second waves of feminism, which focused on different legislation to reflect the time period, working-class feminism focused on creating a better working life for all sexes and races.

The biggest difference in working-class feminism and middle-class feminism was that working-class women worked outside of the home. Middle-class women were confined to their houses because their husbands or families could support them without their assistance. A woman staying at home added to a man's status. Working-class women did not have the luxury of staying home. In order to support themselves and their families, working-class women entered the male dominated workforce. It was there that they experienced the sexism and unequal treatment of a patriarchal society. Most women of color were working-class and on top of sexism, they had to deal with racism. This treatment made it difficult for women to survive, so they created their own form of feminism to fight for equality of employment and pay. These women faced the sexist and racist biases of employers and fought them for equal treatment.

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<sup>86</sup> Dana Frank, "Working-Class Feminism," In *The Reader's Companion to Women's History*, eds. Wilma Mankiller, Gwendolyn Mink, Marysa Navarro, Barbara Smith, and Gloria Steinem, 220-221. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

Working-class feminists fought for equal rights in order to survive.

Destroying the gender barriers of the work place was not the main focus of working-class feminists. Women needed the wages and conditions that the men had in order to properly support themselves and their families. Working-class females used many tactics against employers in the fight for equality such as “knocking on doors; filing legal suits; cross-dressing; or hiding their marital status, sexual orientation, or pregnancies.”<sup>87</sup> All of these factors helped in breaking down barriers for women in the work force. With the barriers broken, the women had access to better wages and better living conditions for their families.

Another factor that differentiated working-class feminists was that they often worked with men to raise the standards of working conditions, as they did in the Labor Movement. Women found it more productive and conducive if they included men in their struggles for better working conditions. Working-class feminism worked towards the advancement of the many over the few. Based on this belief many working-class women also crossed racial barriers, assisting people of color in their fight against the racism of the work place.<sup>88</sup> After the creation of worker’s unions, women split off into their own specialized factions, such as the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW). These organized groups addressed and took action for feminism and class concerns. Working-class feminism assisted all genders and races because of the collective belief that all working-class people should advance.

The fight for equality for working-class feminists started long before the Feminist Movement of the 1970s, but that did not mean that they did not support their middle-class sisters. Working-class feminism focused on the group rather than the individual. In the working-class environment, the women focused on advancing the entire group of workers to better pay and

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<sup>87</sup> Dana Frank, *Working-Class Feminism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 220.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

working conditions, regardless of sex or race; unlike middle-class feminism that focused on the individual and their struggles through society. This middle-class view of feminism was out of reach for the working-class feminists because they were just fighting to survive. Advancing from working-class to middle-class was not possible, let alone destroying social conditioning in those classes. Working-class feminists supported their middle-class sisters, but they could not fight for them when they were already fighting their own battle. Together, both classes of feminists understood the struggles of inequality, but they were fighting them on different planes. While middle-class feminists fought for “access to high-powered professional jobs, political office, or public visibility,” working-class feminists fought “to climb over such barriers [such as race and gender] together or, sometimes, tried to tear them down all together.”<sup>89</sup> This working-class community could also be seen in Buffalo, a major blue-collar city.

Buffalo, New York is known for its diverse population due to immigration but also for its working-class. The steel industry was the main economic force in Buffalo until the early 1980s. This industry created a strong working-class that influenced the way Buffalo saw the Feminist and Gay Liberation Movement of the 1970s. In Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Kennedy’s book, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, they described a strong gay social scene in Buffalo. This scene was more so underground due to the constant police raids, secrecy, and paranoia. This paranoia was from losing jobs if they were found to be a lesbian. Some working-class lesbians did not go to the bars for fear of their families finding out their sexual orientations. *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, focused on the time period before the 1970s. *The Fifth Freedom* spanned from the 1970s to the 1980s. In an article, Julie Lee described how even the gay community fell to the prejudices of classism: “I think what is happening here is what seems to be happening a lot in the [G]ay [M]ovement – namely a class prejudice – for lack of a better word.

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<sup>89</sup> Dana Frank, *Working-Class Feminism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 221.

Too often gay and lesbians view themselves and their culture as middle-class-and-up people, and think that their experiences are “universal”.<sup>90</sup> Buffalo needed a safe forum in which both middle and working-class lesbian and feminists could interact.

When the local chapter of NOW entered Buffalo, lesbians and feminists had the chance to meet in a safe environment and make plans of action. In Carol Speser’s interview she described how in Buffalo, instead of sitting around and having a therapy session, the NOW chapter would go out for beers at a bar and then discuss how to take action. While NOW often preached discussion and contemplation amongst its members, the Buffalo members did not. Sitting and talking about feelings or experiences did not sit well for a predominately working-class community. As was the case with other working-class communities, action was key. Speser talked about how in going to the bar and drinking that the feelings and experiences of other people would come out naturally in conversation. NOW had more success in discussing feelings and experiences by switching the environments of where the group discussion was held. The switch from a circle of women sitting and talking about feelings to women sitting at a bar, drinking, playing games, and interacting with the locals was crucial in Buffalo. This unique therapeutic setting provided a deep sense of unity among the NOW members.

## **Racism**

In her paper, “The Class Roots of Feminism”, Karen Sacks described how the Feminist Movement was diverse in its population and the history behind racial and socio-economic tensions. Sacks’ paper did not address the second wave of feminism but instead published the historical study during that time period. The Feminist Movement of the 1970s was often accused of being a “white middle-class movement.” Sacks explained that limiting the movement to white middle-class priorities was wrong. While the middle-class women of the Suffragist Movement

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<sup>90</sup> Julie Lee, “From Our Mailbag,” *The Fifth Freedom* 9, no. 2 (1979): 2. Box 1, Folder 8.

(1820s-1920s) demanded change, they were not the only ones. Working class women gathered together to fight for equal pay and safe conditions among the workers. Black women gathered to fight racism inherent in the system and gain rights equal to those of white women. Each sector of the female population demanded change in their status.

Limiting the movement to the middle-class suffragists overshadowed the rights fought for by working class and black women. Suffragists often argued against working class women and black women. There were large protests when black men and immigrants won the right to vote before middle-class women. They argued that middle-class women were more educated and qualified than blacks and immigrants, ergo they should have the right to vote. These racist and classist remarks distanced the working class and black women from the Suffragist Movement. This did not stop the working class and black women from fighting for their rights. While the suffragists were one aspect of the first wave of feminism, they were not the most important. Sacks reminds the reader that all women participated in feminism, but each in their own way. Even though Sacks' paper focused on the first wave of feminism it was published during the second wave, and it served as a reminder to all feminists the range of struggles that women faced. Women are constantly calling for change, and despite what changes they focus on, all women are a part of the Feminist Movement.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s helped to establish a more equal footing for the African-American community in the United States of America, but by no means created pure equality. There were still prejudices that the black community faced. These prejudices included stereotypes of laziness, lack of high-salaried jobs, and violence. People of color had a difficult time interacting with feminists and Civil Rights activists, in the same way that lesbians had a hard time with feminists and gay activists. Each side, feminism and Civil Rights, focused on a



different facet of a woman of color. This struggle between balancing race issues and feminist issues was multiplied if the woman of color was a lesbian. Lesbians of color not only had to address race and sex but also sexual orientation. Black homosexuals were often condemned by the black community if they worked with gay rights activists, or any activist community seen as predominately white.

As Benji, a black homosexual, stated, “I assumed, incorrectly it seemed, that gay people being of a minority were more willing to accept other minorities. First lesson in reality: one’s sexual orientation doesn’t necessarily change one’s prejudice.” The Feminist Movement was divided based on race, class, and sexual orientation. Many ethnic minorities were in the lower classes due to low paying jobs and racial prejudice. Most of the race and class issues, especially in Buffalo, could be combined. The issue of racism in the United States of America was an issue that permeated all sexes.

Elizabeth Roth focused on the male attempt to sabotage equality legislation and to undermine feminists. In Roth’s article, “The Civil Rights History of ‘Sex’: A Sexist, Racist Congressional Joke”, she explained how a joke amongst Southern senators and representatives became an actual law. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII protects against discrimination of race, color, national origin, religion, and sex in the work place and hiring practices. The Act of ’64 was in response to the racism in the workplace and hiring practices of businesses. Southern representatives did not want the Act to go through so Representative Howard W. Smith of Virginia introduced the word “sex” to the amendment in order to stop the statute.<sup>91</sup> Southern representatives took it upon themselves to support this inhabiting action while sarcastically supporting the fight against “sex” discrimination. They believed that as Southern gentlemen they

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<sup>91</sup> Elizabeth Roth, *The Civil Rights History of “Sex”: A Sexist, Racist Congressional Joke* (Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1998), 550.

could not allow injustices and discrimination against women. Their argument was that a white woman is more equal than a black woman when it came to job discrimination. Despite their desire to derail the entire bill The Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed with 168 ayes and 133 noes. This became a victory not only against racism but also against sexism. Legislation against sexism was the first step to changing society's view on feminist and then lesbian issues.

### **Lesbian Baiting and Other Difficulties**

Anne Koedt addressed the connection between lesbianism and feminism in her article, *Lesbianism and Feminism*. Koedt was a radical feminist who is most famous for her article, *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm*. Her works highly influenced the Feminist Movement of the 1970s. Women created the link between lesbianism and feminism, according to Koedt. The beginning of the article has five quotes that Koedt refuted and argued are against feminism, even if they support lesbianism. Lesbianism was not sinful or wrong to Koedt. She emphasized that the arguments in place for feminism and lesbianism were not without fallacy. Koedt did not claim that all lesbians are feminists or that all feminists are lesbians. Koedt explained in her article that each movement, the Feminist and the Gay Liberation, have their own agendas and that sometimes those agendas overlapped.

Feminists did not believe that lesbian struggles were women's issues because of the prevalent prejudices surrounding the homosexual community. The Sisters of Sappho, a Buffalo group of lesbian feminists, rebuked the Feminist Movement on this fact, saying,

“Lesbian love is illicit and while straight women may intellectually support us they will never bear the stigma of having their total way of living/loving outlawed. In many mixed women's organizations lesbian issues were not a priority. Issues of gay rights were never addressed concretely until lesbians united and became a visible force in the Women's Movement. Because Sisters of Sappho is a totally lesbian organization it is a place where we are free to be ourselves and relate to one another without hiding any part of ourselves.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> “Sisters of Sappho Lesbian Feminist.” *The Fifth Freedom* 5, no. 10 (1975): 3. Box 1, Folder 4.

This inability to properly focus on lesbian issues hurt the connections between the lesbians and feminists. This disconnect was not surprising because Carol Speser described how lesbianism was seen as a mental illness and a sin against god, something accepted by not only heterosexuals but homosexuals as well. There were no other prevalent opinions on the matter at that time, around the 1950s and 60s. The freedom of choice was not an option because there was no choice to choose from at that time. It is important to remember that they did not reject the idea of accepting homosexuality but rather, that opinion was never consciously thought of as an option.

The Gay Liberation Movement was the process of discovering that there are other avenues to human sexuality and that they are not sinful or a mental illness. Even after removing homosexuality from the list of mental illnesses, the prejudice over homosexuals reigned. What changed the opinions of many people were the connections that they made to others, whether homosexual or heterosexual. Once the gay community began to fight for their rights and a positive image, more and more people accepted a different view point. The Gay Liberation Movement opened the door to discussion on homosexuality and the eventual acceptance of openly active lesbians into the feminist community.

This negative view of homosexuality explained the intense reaction to lesbian baiting. Speser described looking up homosexuality in the dictionary and seeing it compared to murderers and rapists. Before the mid-1970s homosexuality was an intense mental disorder. Being called a lesbian when the connotation is equal to murderer or rapist disturbed the feminist community. Feminism was to fight for the rights of women, not murderers or rapists. When the lesbian community demonstrated and explained the struggles that they went through as lesbians and women, feminists saw a connection. This demonstration was led by the Radicalesbians. They

stormed the stage of the second Congress of NOW, in May 1970. Wearing “Lavender Menace” t-shirts, they informed the members of NOW about the struggles that lesbians faced as homosexuals and as women.<sup>93</sup> This demonstration forced feminists to see and listen to lesbians as oppressed women, something they identified with. This demonstration influenced the passing of the 1971 Resolution, which created a more inclusive and understanding atmosphere for lesbians in the NOW community. Both groups were misunderstood and both wanted the right of respect among their peers, be they male or female.

Many feminists attempted a strict political correctness in order to prevent lesbian baiting that the mainstream media often used to sidetrack the Feminist Movement. Carol Speser recalled that many feminists denied themselves being lesbians because the media painted the Feminist Movement in such a light that all the leaders were closet lesbians. This shame based thinking hurt the Feminist Movement and its connection to the Gay Liberation Movement. Instead of focusing on the abuse of power from the people who used lesbian baiting as a weapon, feminists attempted to prove that they were not in fact lesbians. Lesbian baiting hurt the Feminist Movement but not enough to stop the social change that it brought.

Lesbian baiting was the first section of the article, *Lesbianism and Feminism* by Koedt, and explained what most feminists feared after fighting for their rights of equality. The Board of Directors of the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) in 1973, two years after Koedt’s article was written. Before then homosexuality was a sin and a mental disease. The negative stereotype that went with the accusation of lesbianism greatly affected the feminist community. “Lesbian

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<sup>93</sup> Ilana Eloit and Jonathan D. Katz, *Lesbians Seeing Lesbians*, New York: Leslie/Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, 2011.  
<http://www.leslielohman.org/exhibitions/2011/Lesbians%20Seeing%20Lesbians%20Catalog%20Essay%202011.pdf>

baiting” was a way for men and women to ignore and insult feminists. Men and woman often accused feminists, who spoke up against the social norms, of lesbianism. Koedt described that being called a lesbian was in no way an insult, but a tactical strategy to keep women in line.

Koedt explained that lesbian baiting was a tactic used by men to warn women that they overstepped their boundaries in society. Lesbian baiting feminists was not a new practice. According to Koedt, lesbian baiting “has been an insult directed at [feminists] with escalated regularity ever since they began working politically for women’s liberation.”<sup>94</sup> It was noted that the escalation of accusations happened with each step of power that women created for themselves. Being called a lesbian was an insult that men and conservative women used when they felt threatened by the growing power of the Feminist Movement. However, there was a real fear for feminists who were accused of lesbianism, and that was the total rejection from men. Men hold power and it was through men that women gained most of their power, be it politically, economically, or legally. Politically a woman had less chances of winning elections or passing a bill if accused of being a lesbian. Economically, a woman could lose her job if a rumor spread about her being a lesbian. Finally, legally, a woman would lose her children if it was found that she was a lesbian. By claiming that a woman was a lesbian, a man could ruin her reputation and social life. Being a lesbian or accused of being a lesbian lowered a woman’s status in society. Koedt said that fighting men on the basis of power was putting women’s survival at risk. Lesbian baiting was a way for men to control women and revealed the fears of men.

A perfect example of lesbian baiting came from Carolyn Heilburn’s biography of Gloria Steinem. Barbara Nessim was an artist who became good friends and roommates with Steinem.

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<sup>94</sup> Anne Koedt, *Lesbianism and Feminism* (New York: The New York Times Book Company, 1973), 246-7.

Often Nessim would create art for Steinem, when she needed it.<sup>95</sup> Their friendship ran into lesbian baiting around 1971. Leonard Levitt contacted Nessim, in order to gain information that could tarnish Steinem's character. Levitt was a reporter and columnist at the time. During this contact, Levitt asked if Nessim and Steinem had ever slept together. This lesbian baiting horrified Nessim and she quickly defended herself and Steinem saying that they often went out with men.<sup>96</sup> It was because of the stigma that went with lesbianism that Nessim reacted so violently. Steinem was unhappy with the reaction since her sex life was mostly a secret, even to her family.<sup>97</sup> As a result, Nessim refused to talk to reporters for a decade. This violent reaction was due to the nature of society's view on lesbianism. Homosexuality, before 1973, was seen as a perversion, a mental illness. That stigma on homosexuality, that Nessim still possessed, made feminists leery of not only lesbian baiting but lesbians themselves. This caused numerous tensions within the Feminist Movement between heterosexual and homosexual women.<sup>98</sup>

Unlike Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem stood up for and accepted different sexual identities into the Feminist Movement. An example of Steinem's all-inclusive nature was her place at a press conference for Kate Millet. Millet was not a lesbian but rather a bisexual. The media often created leaders for the Feminist Movement by focusing on specific women; such as Friedan, Steinem, and Millet. In September 1970, Millet published a feminist theoretical book called *Sexual Politics*. It gained the attention of the media and placed her on *Time*'s cover.<sup>99</sup> Her popularity resulted in a background check of her life and it was discovered that she had announced at a meeting that she was bisexual. *Time* then denounced Millet as a leader of the Feminist Movement. In solidarity, Steinem and a group of women held a press conference to

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<sup>95</sup> Carolyn Heilburn, *The Education of a Woman* (New York: The Dial Press, 1995), 98.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> "MSing Persons: Gay," *The Fifth Freedom* 5, no. 9 (1975): 16. Box 1, Folder 4.

<sup>99</sup> Carolyn Heilburn, *The Education of a Woman* (New York: The Dial Press, 1995), 164.

defend Millet. The entire time Steinem held Millet's hand, a clear sign of her support. Steinem went on to write articles admonishing the Feminist Movement, particularly NOW for their structurelessness, which contributed to homophobia.

Trashing, similar to lesbian baiting was another tool used to oppress women, though ironically it was usually women who trashed other women. The basic definition of trashing is when a person slanders another person's character, in order to discredit the second person's reputation. As Joreen explained in her article, "Trashing: The Dark Side of Sisterhood",

"What is "trashing," this colloquial term that expresses so much, yet explains so little? It is not disagreement; it is not conflict; it is not opposition. These are perfectly ordinary phenomena which, when engaged in mutually, honestly, and not excessively, are necessary to keep an organism or organization healthy and active. Trashing is a particularly vicious form of character assassination which amounts to psychological rape. It is manipulative, dishonest, and excessive. It is occasionally disguised by the rhetoric of honest conflict, or covered up by denying that any disapproval exists at all. But it is not done to expose disagreements or resolve differences. It is done to disparage and destroy."<sup>100</sup>

The most infamous trashing was between Friedan and Steinem. Friedan often trashed Steinem and her persona.<sup>101</sup> The theories for why she trashed Steinem were numerous: Friedan was envious of Steinem's looks, she was losing her place as feminism's "mother," or she resented Steinem adding causes to the Feminist Movement, like abortion and lesbianism. Trashing could include lesbian baiting but it was not limited to it. The concept and practice of trashing hurt the movement just as much as lesbian baiting. Instead of focusing on the issues at hand, it created a defensive and oppressive atmosphere, such as the strained relationship between Steinem and Friedan.

Gloria Steinem was the co-founder of *Ms.* magazine. *Ms.* was a magazine that wrote about, was written by, and supported by women. It was the only non-gay orientated magazine that continuously published about lesbian issues.<sup>102</sup> Steinem often pushed the lesbian issue into

<sup>100</sup> Joreen, "Trashing: The Dark Side of Sisterhood," *Ms.*, April 1976.

<sup>101</sup> Carolyn Heilburn, *The Education of a Woman* (New York: The Dial Press, 1995), 242.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

the Feminist Movement. When asked she proudly wore the lavender armband in support of lesbian issues. The mainstream media either accused her of being a lesbian or using men for power.<sup>103</sup> Steinem would answer lesbian baiting with ambiguous answers, never clearly stating her sexuality. Her easy acceptance of lesbians into the Feminist Movement made her a strong and positive leader.

In 1977, during an interview, Gloria Steinem reiterated a problem that Speser herself faced when publishing a magazine. Steinem recalled advertisements pulling out because of verbiage used by fellow writers, such as Flo Kennedy.<sup>104</sup> Unlike Speser, she did not recall any arguments against the lesbian content. Both women understood that sometimes advertisers refused to fund a publication because of certain content that was too much to handle.<sup>105</sup> If Steinem lost funders because of the lesbian issues, she was not sure, but she understood that censoring the *Ms.* magazine based on homophobia was not an option.

A popular example of the effect of lesbian baiting was Betty Friedan, who fought for women's rights but had limits. To Friedan, and many women at the time, being accused of being a lesbian was a source of great stress. Friedan fought vehemently against the image of lesbians within NOW and the Feminist Movement. Sexual identity was not an important issue of the Feminist Movement, according to Friedan. Although Friedan was not violently homophobic, she was not the champion of sexual liberation. Friedan believed that the issue of sexuality was not an issue of the Feminist Movement; therefore, lesbianism was not a platform. Decades later, Friedan supported the rights of homosexuals. The second wave of feminism was too new and unstable in Friedan's eyes to support the radical views of lesbianism. Critics often criticized Friedan's

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<sup>103</sup> Carolyn Heilburn, *The Education of a Woman* (New York: The Dial Press, 1995), 255.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*



narrow view on the Feminist Movement and her interpretation of women.<sup>106</sup> Betty Friedan was “the feminist that didn’t like women.”<sup>107</sup>

Suzanne Pharr reiterated this fear of lesbian baiting in, *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism*. Heterosexism was the assumption that there was only one sexuality: heterosexuality.<sup>108</sup> It was this sense of normalcy, according to Pharr, that hurt the lesbians within the Feminist Movement. When the Feminist Movement began, lesbians believed that they had found a safe place.<sup>109</sup> The liberation of women meant the liberation of all women, in spite of race, sexual orientation, and class. The acceptance of lesbians into the movement came along further into the 1970s. As the progress of integrating lesbian issues into the Feminist Movement began so did the rhetoric of not flaunting a person’s sexual orientation.<sup>110</sup>

There are two kinds of lesbian baiting, according to Pharr; they are within and without. The example used for ‘within’ was a volunteer organizer who happened to be lesbian.<sup>111</sup> A disagreement with her new strategies emerged, but instead of attacking the ideas, the dissenters attacked the volunteer organizer’s sexuality. The hurtful rumors supersede what the real problem was about, the new volunteer strategies. Eventually it ended with the volunteer organizer losing her job because of the homophobic staff and her misfortunate homosexuality.<sup>112</sup> The without example was about funders of an organization who cut their funding because of the volunteer organizer, who happened to be lesbian. The threat of no funding led to scrutiny of the work of the volunteer organizer. A mistake was found, or hunted down or even fabricated, and she was replaced with a heterosexual. To Pharr these are forms of lesbian baiting. The threat of

<sup>106</sup> Judith Hennessee, *Betty Friedan: Her Life* (New York: Penguin Group, 1999), 85.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., Inside Sleeve of Cover.

<sup>108</sup> Suzanne Pharr, *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism* (Little Rock: Chardon Press, 1988), 29.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>111</sup> This was a general example and does not refer to a specific person or place.

<sup>112</sup> Suzanne Pharr, *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism* (Little Rock: Chardon Press, 1988), 35.

unemployment was doubled if the volunteer organizer was a woman of color.

All women, no matter their sexual identity, were hurt by the fear that lesbian baiting caused.<sup>113</sup> The Feminist Movement was a liberation movement for women. It was created for women, by women, and supported by women. Lesbian baiting created doubt of character. This doubt led to women defending themselves from an accusation that was designed to put them back into their place.<sup>114</sup> Women who openly and aggressively fought for liberation were dismissed with accusations of man-hater or lesbian. The fear drove many women to become closet feminists.<sup>115</sup> The issue of the Feminist Movement, the liberation of women, was on hold because of fear. Pharr argued that instead of fear, women needed to fight against homophobia and heterosexism. Destroying those two institutions would dispel the power of lesbian baiting.

When men accused feminists of being lesbian, it revealed men's insecurity with independent women as being unfeminine. Lesbians did not need men sexually, ergo they were independent of men for sex. Men then concluded that if lesbians were independent of men for one aspect of life, then lesbians had no need for men at all. This was a gross leap in judgment, but Koedt explained that this assumption led men to believe that lesbians were independent in personality. When a woman acted out independently, be it politically or in a social setting, men became nervous. Men needed women to rely on them to keep the status quo. Lesbian baiting was therefore a way for men to tell women that they were acting too independently and needed to stop. A general example would be if a man threatened to label his wife as a lesbian in order to stop her from leaving him. If she were labeled as a lesbian then she would lose the children, if there were any. That was the power of lesbian baiting. Koedt then went on to say that while lesbian baiting was a tool for men against women it was not an effective one. To Koedt,

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<sup>113</sup> Suzanne Pharr, *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism* (Little Rock: Chardon Press, 1988), 36.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

lesbianism and feminism were bound to meet in their search for social justice; men pointing that out made lesbians and feminists consider each other as allies. As discussed previously, lesbians and feminists found each other through activism and community knowledge. Neither feminists nor lesbians solely relied on lesbian baiting in order to know of each other's existence. By saying that lesbians and feminists did find each other through lesbian baiting indicated that Koedt believed that men were the reasons of lesbian and feminist relations not the women themselves, a seemingly odd point for a feminist to make.

*The Woman Identified Woman* by Radicalesbians, a short-lived group of lesbian feminists,<sup>116</sup> addressed lesbian baiting and the role of women in the Feminist Movement. Koedt referred to this article twice in reference to the sexism that women faced. Both articles settled on the same themes such as lesbian baiting and how women must create a new identity for themselves, thus destroying the sex roles of society. Unlike Koedt, Radicalesbians believed that to create a new identity women must look to other women. Once women rejected men then the process of self-identification started.

Radicalesbians recognized lesbian baiting but they believed that it was more of a complement than an insult. Lesbians were independent of men. When a woman, homosexual or not, was too independent men lesbian baited her. It was a warning. To Radicalesbians it meant that a woman became the man's equal and he retaliated with an insult. Being independent of man and being his equal was not an insult. Radicalesbians encouraged women to look past the insult to the real threat. The sex roles in society claimed that women must rely on men.

Sexism was the root cause of the fear that women felt when accused as a lesbian. Women, by society's rules, were reliant on men for power. As such, women were sex objects for

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<sup>116</sup> "Radicalesbians," GLBQT <http://www.glbqt.com/social-sciences/radicalesbians.html> (accessed June 5, 2014).

men to use, but lesbians denied this sex role. Radicalesbians emphasized that all women were the same, despite what men believed, and that the only difference between a heterosexual woman and a lesbian was their sexual orientation. Instead of the sexist fear behind lesbianism, women needed to empower themselves with the presence of other women.

Feminists, according to Radicalesbians, were avoiding the topic of lesbianism because of the inherent fear of rejection from men. Feminists ignored the lesbian issue referred to as the “lavender herring.”<sup>117</sup> Lesbians knew and believed in their place in the Feminist Movement. Radicalesbians believe that if women wanted to create a new identity, as the Feminist Movement urged, then they must reject men. The fear of rejection from the male dominated society was inconsequential. As the title suggested, women must identify with other women in order to liberate themselves.

The Feminist Movement wanted the liberation of women, yet it reduced lesbians to their sexual orientation. As discussed, Heterosexism was the assumption that the societal norm was heterosexuality. This meant that heterosexuals could engage in public displays of affection, they could discuss potential sexual partners, and they could openly discuss their love lives. Heterosexuals flaunt their sexuality constantly.<sup>118</sup> When homosexuals reacted the same way to their love lives and relationship status, they were scorned for flaunting their sexuality. Lesbians faced this dilemma when some feminists claimed, “The only difference between you and me is who you sleep with. It’s just a bedroom issue, just kinky sex in this time of sexual liberation.”<sup>119</sup> Lesbianism was not a kink, it was a way of life. This meant that lesbianism did not stop at sexuality but permeated into every aspect of life, such as how they talked and acted around

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<sup>117</sup> Radicalesbians, *The Woman Identified Woman* (New York: The New York Times Book Company, 1973), 243.

<sup>118</sup> Suzanne Pharr, *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism* (Little Rock: Chardon Press, 1988), 29.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

friends and family or how they discussed their problems. As Julia Penelope, in her article “The Mystery of Lesbians”, said, “...my Lesbianism was never a choice in the way that many speak of it now. My Lesbian identity has never been merely a “preference” for me; it’s not an identity I casually selected from a Baskin-Robbins sexuality counter. Heterosexuality wasn’t an “option” for me.”<sup>120</sup> Debasing lesbians into who they slept with was insulting and demeaning. It furthered their dissatisfaction with the Feminist Movement.

Pharr recognized that lesbianism was not about sex but rather sexual identity. Carol Speser encountered this when she questioned whether or not she was a lesbian because she had not yet had sex with a woman. Being a lesbian was about the identity, as was the same for heterosexuals. A person does not need to have sex with a specific gender in order to know their sexual identity. This thinking was not the norm. Pharr described how a book about lesbian nuns shocked many people.<sup>121</sup> It was hard to understand that these nuns could be lesbians and celibate. This was because of heterosexism. Society was used to the affections and open displays of heterosexuality and anything that delineated from that norm was abnormal. The concept that lesbianism was a state of being, a sexual identity, did not occur to many people, even feminists.

The Radical and Lesbian Feminists embraced the idea of women supporting women. The terms Radical and Lesbian feminists are often interchangeable in feminist literature. For research purposes there will be strict definitions. Radical Feminists had a stronger allegiance to the Feminist Movement, but they supported lesbians in their endeavors. Lesbian Feminists differed in that their sexuality came first and they focused mainly on lesbian issues with a feminist perspective. The constant interchangeability of radical feminism and lesbian feminists most likely confused feminists at the time. A prime example of the complexity of definitions was from

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<sup>120</sup> Julia Penelope, “The Mystery of Lesbians,” *Gossip* Volume 1, no. 1 (1986): 14. Box 22, Folder 8.

<sup>121</sup> Suzanne Pharr, *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism* (Little Rock: Chardon Press, 1988), 29.

GOSSIP, a lesbian feminist journal, and their first editor's note, "We are all radical feminists who see lesbianism as necessary to radical feminism and feel a need for discussion of the ethical issues which affect our lives: the way we behave to each other, and in the world at large."<sup>122</sup>

Koedt used the terms radical feminists and lesbian feminists interchangeably. Most of the community understood that radical feminists were different from lesbian feminists. Lesbian feminists often promoted a society of women supporting women in the strictest sense. Small farming coalitions in upstate New York were created by lesbian-feminists. These farms were made and supported by women. While the farms never lasted, they were important for creating a sense of self and independence from a male dominated society. Businesses made by women hired only women to support the theory that men were not vital. Friedan's feminism was equality to men, but making men the ultimate goal of equality did not fit with the growing tides of feminists. Some radicals went so far as to become political lesbians. Political lesbians practiced a world made free of men and counted on other women for social and political structure. This did not mean that political lesbians were attracted to women sexually, but rather they appreciated a world without the influence of men.

The new alliance of lesbian and feminists led to the complications of definitions and what it means to be in one or both movements. For the purpose of this article, Koedt referred to lesbians as "women having sexual relations with women" and radical feminists were people who advocated "the total elimination of sex roles."<sup>123</sup> Koedt's radical feminists are different from the radical feminists previously described. While she used the term "radical feminists", it was most likely that she was referring to lesbian feminists, who shared similar views to the "radical feminists" that she described. The reason for defining lesbians and radical feminists was that

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<sup>122</sup> "Editor's Introduction," *Gossip* Volume 1, no. 1 (1986): 5. Box 22, Folder 8.

<sup>123</sup> Anne Koedt, *Lesbianism and Feminism* (New York: The New York Times Book Company, 1973), 248.

Koedt explored different arguments pertaining to the lifestyles of those two groups. Some lesbians believed that lesbianism was not just women having sex with each other but the complete rejection of men in their lives. To them, lesbianism was a life dedicated to women. For radical feminists (according to Koedt), their main goal was to prove that biology did not determine a person's course in life. Radical feminists broke down society's barriers based on sex roles and called for an equal world. Lesbians and radical feminists came together over the similar point that biology does not determine sex roles. Koedt pointed out that while radical feminism accepted lesbianism, there were some points of the Gay Liberation Movement that radical feminists did not adhere to based on their basic definition of dissolution of sex roles.

The dissolution of sex roles did not apply to all aspects of the Gay Liberation Movement. Koedt used the example of a male homosexual and a female heterosexual who act in a feminine manner that was expected of women from society. According to radical feminism, this was unhealthy because each person was performing an assigned gender role. Neither the overly flamboyant male homosexual or heterosexual female were acting in a manner that reflected their personality. Instead, both individuals were acting in a manner that society dictated for the female sex. The example for a healthy relationship was two lesbians who explored and experimented with the positive aspects of society's view on masculinity and femininity. Neither woman accepted a gender role fully, which then created a new and equal environment. Koedt favored the second example as a healthy relationship. Radical feminists supported lesbianism in that both partners must be equal and not adhere to society's norms.

Some lesbians believed that they were the vanguard of the Feminist Movement because they rejected sex roles and men long before the feminists. Koedt disagreed and defended her opinion based on personal versus political. A radical feminist, according to Koedt, was a woman

“who is working politically in society to destroy the institutions of sexism.”<sup>124</sup> Lesbianism was a personal act between women. Being a lesbian did not create political equality or end sexism. The solution for the end of sexism was not lesbianism. Koedt believed that any woman, homosexual or heterosexual, who defied their role as dictated to them by society was a feminist working towards gender equality. Radical feminists were the women who went one-step further and were politically active in destroying the patriarchy. Rejecting the sex roles of men was radical feminism. Koedt did not believe that lesbians who fully reject men are liberated. For Koedt, “the crucial point is not the sex of your bed partner but the sex role of your bed partner.”<sup>125</sup> This was in contradiction to the common argument that if a feminist was not a lesbian then she was not a true feminist.

Radical feminists often faced the argument that if they were not sleeping with women then they were not true feminists. Koedt explained in sections before this argument about the Gay Liberation Movement and its Civil Rights perspective. As before, Koedt described how sexism was at the root of the anti-homosexuality position. Sexism must die politically before equality reigned in personal lives. The argument that a feminist must sleep with women in order to be a true radical feminist was invalid. Koedt noted that there must be a separation of personal life versus the political life. Women’s personal lives were exposed to the public with the intention to unite women. The exposure created a sense of community in order to fight the oppression of the patriarchy. This was only a step in the direction of radical feminism. According to Koedt, no radical feminist was liberated fully from man. Liberation happens when they fight for political rights and the end of sex roles. Radical feminists were still finding themselves and creating new persons, against the views of society. Bullying women into sleeping with other

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<sup>124</sup> Anne Koedt, *Lesbianism and Feminism* (New York: The New York Times Book Company, 1973), 250.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.



women did not help the cause. Women must feel safe enough to discuss feminism without the fear of their personal lives being politically debated.

Ti-Grace Atkinson was best known for her radical feminism. Her background was from a wealthy family and she studied political philosophy at Columbia University.<sup>126</sup> In 1967, Atkinson joined NOW; Betty Friedan quickly recognized her potential and promoted Atkinson through the ranks. In the same year Atkinson became the president of the NOW New York, which was known for its diversity. She only remained in that position for a year until she resigned. This was due to her more radical views of feminism. Atkinson tended to support positions that NOW was not addressing at that point in time, this included lesbianism. After Atkinson's proposal to assign leadership positions via lottery was vetoed by the head NOW leaders, she left on October 17<sup>th</sup>.

The date was significant in that a group of more radical feminists broke off from NOW to support Atkinson. They named themselves the October 17 Movement. The group was small but did not remain so for long. It was because of its growth that in 1969 they changed their name to The Feminists.<sup>127</sup> The group went on to produce new feminist theories. They were opposed to the institute of marriage because they believe it oppressed women. It was because of this stance that many women left the organization. Eventually it went from opposing marriage to opposing any relationship with men in general. This strict adherence to perfect public image hurt the organization and Atkinson who tried to never be seen with a man publicly.

As The Feminists grew they were very strict in their policies.<sup>128</sup> In accordance with their anti-marriage stance only one third of the members were married. Meetings were absolutely

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<sup>126</sup> Jane Gerhard. "Atkinson, Ti-Grace." *Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered History in America*. Ed. Marc Stein. Vol. 1. Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004. 100-101. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. (accessed May 9, 2014).

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

mandatory. Atkinson finally got her wish and leadership roles were chosen based on a lottery system. She designed this lottery system to expand the horizons and experiences of the members. This meant that writers were encouraged not to put in their names for anything writing intensive, since they were already experienced in that area. No main woman was the leader of the group and during meetings, they passed around a speaking disc.<sup>129</sup> A speaking disc was an object that, if a person possessed it, it meant that that person could speak uninterrupted. The group emphasized its stance on heterosexual love as oppressive instead of consciousness raising. They believed consciousness raising distracted feminists from the real issues, such as lawmaking. This belief that consciousness raising distracted feminists seemed at odds with the movement's desire to create gender equality.

Atkinson eventually left this group in 1970 due to her limited access to talk with the press. During the 1970s, Atkinson continued to write and conduct TV interviews.<sup>130</sup> Like Steinem, Atkinson supported Kate Millet and attended the press conference in support. Atkinson went on to write more on feminist theory. Eventually her writings and speeches were collected into a single volume called *Amazon Odyssey*. Steinem and Atkinson had a falling out due to rumors about Steinem's involvement with the CIA. Atkinson was too leery of spying government officials and decided to break all contact with Steinem.

In an article by Judith Martin, Ti-Grace Atkinson described the Feminist Movement as "on the skids."<sup>131</sup> Atkinson was afraid that the second wave of feminism would die like the first. After the suffragists gained their right to vote the willpower to keep fighting for rights slowly dwindled. Atkinson did not want this to happen to the second wave of feminism. In that current

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<sup>129</sup> Jane Gerhard. "Atkinson, Ti-Grace." *Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered History in America*. Ed. Marc Stein. Vol. 1. Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004. 100-101. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. (accessed May 9, 2014).

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Judith Martin. "Ti-Grace Atkinson: To Aid the Cause." *The Washington Post (1974-Current File)*, Oct 18, 1974, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/146120222?accountid=7259> (accessed May 9, 2014).

year of 1974, Atkinson proclaimed that there were no new ideas since 1969. Reflecting on the views of the Feminists, Atkinson said that there was too much consciousness raising and not enough action. To her, the Feminist Movement was a big entertaining party. Atkinson urged feminists to go back to their roots of political action. The shift from action to rhetoric, according to Atkinson, had to be reversed. Atkinson advocated policies like financial assistance to women who divorced their husbands.<sup>132</sup>

Atkinson did not like the “second phase” of the second wave of feminism.<sup>133</sup> She believed that the lack of political action on the feminists’ part was due to the end of the Anti-War Movement. There were more people in the streets protesting with the Anti-War Movement. These protesting groups created an atmosphere that was more active with social justice issues. Atkinson believed that the feminists that joined after the 1960s were not as committed to the cause as the feminists from the 1960s, such as herself. In the article, Atkinson said that she learned many strategic ideas from her association with the mafia boss Joe Colombo and his Italian-American Civil Rights League.<sup>134</sup> From her experience there, she learned to speak and interact with working-class people. Her middle-upper class background had hurt her in the past, but these new skills helped her better connect with working class activists. Atkinson finished the article with the hope of a more activist future, “It’s time to roll up our sleeves and jump back in. But first we’ve got to make the tub we’re going to jump into.”<sup>135</sup>

Anne Koedt understood the connection between the Gay Liberation and the Feminist Movements. Both movements defied the sex roles demanded by society. Radical feminists were looking for the dissolution of sex roles in all aspects of life. Lesbians were looking for equality

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<sup>132</sup> Judith Martin. "Ti-Grace Atkinson: To Aid the Cause." *The Washington Post (1974-Current File)*, Oct 18, 1974, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/146120222?accountid=7259> (accessed May 9, 2014).

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

and understanding for their sexual orientation. Forcing each side to accept the same goals was detrimental. Each movement could work together to bring about a more equal society but it could not be forced. In order for the movements to succeed, they must understand and respect each other's boundaries. Koedt believed that with understanding and activism came change. Lesbians and radical feminists could work together to create a more equal world if they respected each other.

Grace Ti-Atkinson was often attributed with the quote "that feminism is the theory and lesbianism is the practice."<sup>136</sup> In an interview with Carol Anne Douglas, Atkinson defended that quote in context. The quote, in context, meant that if women analyzed lesbianism then they would better analyze the oppression of women. Despite the misunderstanding of her quote, Atkinson was pleased at women experiencing lesbian love. Atkinson did not appreciate the romanticism of lesbianism as the crux of the Feminist Movement.<sup>137</sup> Simplifying the Feminist Movement as the vanguard of lesbianism bothered Atkinson. She attributed this to her speeches about lesbianism.

In her speeches, Atkinson often overstated her case in favor of lesbians in order to combat the negativity and hostility that feminists felt towards the lesbian community.<sup>138</sup> She regretted her actions only in that they were misinterpreted as romanticism, or fantastical ideas. Atkinson warned to not put lesbians on a pedestal. Lesbians struggle to live and love and that was not something to take lightly.<sup>139</sup> Instead of romanticizing lesbians, Atkinson called for an awareness of the issue, in order to fight.

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<sup>136</sup> Carol Anne Douglas. Ti-Grace Atkinson: Amazon Continues Odyssey. *Off our Backs*, Dec 31, 1979. 2, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/197137697?accountid=7259> (accessed May 9, 2014).

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

Atkinson noted that many lesbians contacted her about political lesbianism and they were disappointed with her acceptance of that practice.<sup>140</sup> Atkinson stood by the view. She realized her idealization of lesbianism was insulting and recognized it in the interview. Atkinson still admired the idea of political lesbianism. To her it was a relationship between two women that was not oversexualized. Atkinson lamented how sexualization took over the lesbians in the Feminist Movement.<sup>141</sup> It was why she still positively favored political lesbianism. Atkinson believed that it was less sexualized and more focused on the bonds of female friendship. Through her experiences, Atkinson understood how her simplification of lesbianism hurt the gay community. She stood by her words from the time because of the hostility of the feminists towards that lesbians.

*The Woman Identified Woman* articles began with the question, “What is a lesbian?”<sup>142</sup> According to Radicalesbians, a lesbian was a woman who grew up in a state of confusion and rebellion. A lesbian did not conform to society’s rules. She found herself fighting with the people around her and the perceptions of what she was supposed to be. It was a lesbian’s lack of desire towards men that made her unfeminine. Sex roles in society said that a woman was a woman when she was with a man. A lesbian, therefore could not be a woman because she was with another woman, not a man. This independent streak led to scorn from society.

The reason that women shied away from identifying with other women, according to Radicalesbians, was self-hate. The realization of the dominance of men created a self-hate in women. Self-hate among women manifested from the dependence on men. By eradicating the need for men within society then women’s self-hate evaporated. Radicalesbians urged feminists

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<sup>140</sup> Carol Anne Douglas. Ti-Grace Atkinson: Amazon Continues Odyssey. *Off our Backs*, Dec 31, 1979. 2, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/197137697?accountid=7259> (accessed May 9, 2014).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Radicalesbians, *The Woman Identified Woman* (New York: The New York Times Book Company, 1973), 240.

and women alike to accept the lesbian lifestyle. The lesbian life style was creating a life surrounded and supported by females. Eliminating the sex roles of society opened new relationships between women. This was an overly optimistic outlook on the lives of lesbians and their interactions within their communities.

Speser talked of attending conferences for lesbians and one of the main conferences that she attended holds no record of existence. The first and only National Lesbian Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, holds no record of existence. The purpose of this conference was to bring together a group of lesbians and discuss important issues. The lack of records was because of the political correctness of the conference leaders and its rigid rules. There were no photographs because someone might have a seizure from the flash. The conference leaders attempted to remain completely politically correct to avoid any offense but ended up failing. People were offended and many took solace in private rooms to discuss topics without the hindrance of the conference regulators.

The strong emphasis on the political correctness of the conference hindered the National Lesbian Conference from discussing issues in a supportive and safe atmosphere. An example that Speser remembered was during the preliminary setup of the conference the women were typing away a list of organizations and one of them forgot to include an organization. The organization that she forgot to type happened to be a black organization. In the middle of the night session, the woman had to stand up and face the entire group to apologize for being racist in her typing. It was nothing but a typo that happened during the long working hours of the night. This violent and accusing atmosphere hurt the conference more than it helped.

Creating a safe and comfortable atmosphere for all of the women at the conference was a hard balance. At times unintentional mistakes that were made offended a group(s). At the first

and only National Lesbian Conference the phrase “black and white” was racist. A woman tried to explain that lesbian issues were simple with no moral ambiguity but because she used the phrase “black and white”, she was labeled as a racist.

The intense emphasis on the political correctness of the conference left people more frightened than feeling safe. To assist the people in feeling safer they had separate rooms for different groups. These safe space rooms were a space for peace and tranquility. These safe space rooms were labeled for different groups such as “Safe Space for Jewish Lesbians” and so forth. Speser described an experience where she and her partner sought out a safe space, to relax from the tense atmosphere of the conference. What they thought was a meditation room was actually a mediation room. It ended with them leaving the room as a group of women entered to shout at each other. These safe space rooms were a place for people to calm down and reflect. While the conference desired to be politically correct in order to not offend anyone it instead made safe space rooms more desirable in order to get away from the tense atmosphere of the conference. In trying to be politically correct, they fostered a strained atmosphere, which drove its participants to safe rooms for honest conversation.

It was on a Sunday that the tense atmosphere came to a head when the air conditioning broke. For the first and only Lesbian National Conference, women were celebrated for their achievements. When the air conditioning broke, they demanded the hotel to call for a female repairwoman. They were not successful locating a female repairperson, especially on a Sunday so the conference had to accept the presence of a man in the room. In a compromise, a group of women held hands to form a circle around the repairman and escorted him to the air conditioner. This created a barrier of women and made the repairman uneasy. The focus went from the purpose of the conference to the repairman and in doing so negatively affected the conference.

The air conditioning unit was in the main area of the conference, this interrupted many discussions that were taking place at the time. The inconvenience was because the conference demanded a woman repairperson for the air conditioner and then formed a circle of women around the male repairperson that eventually came. Instead of a quick fix the leaders of the conference extended the time of having a broken air conditioner because they wanted to be politically correct and not have any male presence at the conference. The neurotic political correctness of the conference took away from the issues at hand.

Political correctness is a reference and reminder to be mindful of a person's audience and to be kind to that audience. In Speser's experience at the conference, the political correctness was just to make sure no one was offended. While the conference's belief in political correctness was not wrong, according to Speser, because being politically correct was right, it did morph it into a weapon to use against conference attendees. Making sure that no one was offended is a part of kindness, but not all. The conference had safe spaces to give women a chance to calm down and feel safe. Feeling safe is also a factor of kindness. While the conference had factors of kindness it did not combine them very well. Speser believed that being politically correct came naturally if a person thought and spoke with kindness. The conference, to Speser went from being a kind atmosphere to a judgmental atmosphere.

### **Lesbianism and Feminism in Buffalo and the Nation**

Nan Alamilla Boyd's article *Lesbian Feminism* summed up the concept and the connection of lesbian feminism. The Feminist and Gay Liberation Movements grew during the same time period and peaked during the 1970s. It was in the 1970s that the movements worked together and the lesbian feminist community formed. The core beliefs of the lesbian feminists



were that women need to put other women first and reject the patriarchy, this applied to sexual partners and friendships. This view coincided with the core beliefs of the Feminist Movement, but the radical nature of completely rejecting men caused rifts between the two communities. Lesbian feminists alienated not only other feminists but the gay community and the people of color communities. Their radical ideas made other communities uncomfortable. As a lesbian feminist lamented, “How can we say what we mean when it may involve alienating or losing friends if our ideas are unpopular or go against current trends?”<sup>143</sup> These separations lead to their eventual downfall.

Lesbian feminism developed out of the combination of the Feminist and Gay Liberation Movements. The Feminist Movement concentrated on the inequalities that females faced in a patriarchal society. They demanded equality between women and men. The Gay Liberation Movement changed from their stance of acceptance from society to a more aggressive approach of equal rights and social change. This separation from a bigger group happened to lesbians who felt that the Gay Liberation Movement focused mainly on men. The lesbians then reached out to the feminists and formed their own group of lesbian feminists.

The rise of separate consciousness-raising awareness groups that formed in the Feminist Movement lead to the separation into radical feminist groups and then to lesbian feminists. Boyd claimed that the lesbian feminists asserted themselves the most in the Feminist Movement. In order to understand the basics that the radical feminists preached, one only had to look at lesbian feminism. As lesbian feminists rejected men, they turned to a life dedicated fully to women.

One of the most controversial views of lesbian feminism was that sexual orientation was a choice. They believed that women could choose to be sexually active or intimate with other women. Like feminists in the main movement, lesbian feminists believed that gender inequality

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<sup>143</sup> “Editor’s Introduction,” *Gossip* Volume 1, no. 1 (1986): 5. Box 22, Folder 8.

was the root cause of the oppression of women. Instead of correcting the sexist behavior in society lesbian feminists believed that rejecting the male population fully and only catering to the female population would destroy the patriarchy. These beliefs isolated the lesbian feminists from other movements, feminists, and lesbians.

Boyd claimed that isolation from other groups, such as the feminists, the Gay Liberation Movement, working class lesbians, and people of color, ultimately hurt the lesbian feminists. Feminists did not believe in rejecting the male populace; instead, they believed in reeducation to create an equal society. Working-class lesbians did not believe that their sexual orientation was a choice, rather they were born with an attraction to females.<sup>144</sup> Lesbian feminists rejected the working-class lesbians in turn because they disapproved of the Butch and Femme stereotypes that reflected the patriarchy in lesbian relationships. Any ties with men were completely severed.<sup>145</sup> According to Boyd, by the 1970s, any contact with males, be they homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual, ended. Finally, feminists and lesbians of color rejected lesbian feminists because the lesbian feminists did not recognize racial inequality. Lesbian feminists led to their own isolation. The isolation of the lesbian feminists made them out of touch with society and the world around them. Despite being withdrawn from society, lesbian feminists played an active and politically aggressive role in both the Feminists and Gay Liberation Movement.

Lesbian-feminism was the political belief of women loving other women, but at the same time not being gay. Lesbian women believed that they did not choose to be lesbian, that they were born that way and deserved equal treatment because of this natural state. Lesbian-feminists, however, chose to be lesbians unlike their homosexual counterparts. To them lesbian-feminism was a political statement and life style. As feminists examined their relationships with men, they

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<sup>144</sup> Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Lesbian Feminism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 214.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

realized the inequality in heterosexuality. This led to the belief that lesbianism was “the highest form of love and heterosexuality as a sign of female masochism.”<sup>146</sup> The examination led to many women becoming lesbian-feminists.

Homosexuality was the answer to lesbian-feminists’ dilemma of sexism. To lesbian-feminists, lesbianism was a choice that every single woman had intrinsically. It was up to the woman whether she accepted lesbianism into her life. This form of lesbian-feminism did not always include sexual intercourse. To lesbian-feminists, if a woman supported and loved another woman, then that woman was a lesbian. This created the idea that in order to be a true feminist that women had to be lesbians. Many women left their husbands to become lesbian-feminists.

Most lesbian-feminists were lesbians from birth<sup>147</sup> but a select few did choose to be lesbian as a political point. This often confused people. Although lesbian-feminism did not always include sexual pleasure, it was a positive inclusion for those who chose to be lesbians. Lesbian-feminists were delighted to find that even though they changed their sexual preferences they did not feel a lack of pleasure in their sex lives. There were some radical feminists that chose celibacy over intimacy with any gender but most lesbian-feminists preferred the sexual company of women. Lesbian-feminists wanted to destroy the patriarchy by first destroying heterosexuality. The radicalism of the lesbian-feminists isolated them from other groups of activists. There were affinities to other groups, such as homosexuals and feminists, but the radicalism of the lesbian-feminists kept those groups to a minimum.

Despite the radicalism of the lesbian-feminists and their separation with other organizations<sup>148</sup>, they did influence feminist groups. The Feminist Movement wanted to end

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<sup>146</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 205.

<sup>147</sup> Julia Penelope, “The Mystery of Lesbians,” *Gossip* Volume 1, no. 1 (1986): 14. Box 22, Folder 8.

<sup>148</sup> Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Lesbian Feminism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 214.

gender roles, not hate a specific sex like the lesbian-feminists. Under the guidance of Betty Friedan, the NOW organization shunned the lesbian-feminists until 1971. The 1971 resolution to include lesbian issues into feminist issues showed that under pressure the NOW community generally accepted lesbians into the Feminist Movement. Persecution of lesbians was because of their lack of attachment to men. Feminists identified this problem as defining women only in relationship to men. This belief went against the goals of the Feminist Movement and therefore lesbian issues within society were women's issues. Lesbian-feminists took this resolution as a victory for their cause and convinced older feminists of the rights of homosexuality. After NOW accepted lesbians, others followed suit such as the National Women's Political Caucus and the National Women's Agenda, which included the YWCA and the Girl Scouts. This acceptance of the radical feminists helped to change society's thinking on lesbianism and discrimination.

Lesbian-feminists were abrasive and militant in their goals to rid society of sexism and often turned off older generations of lesbians. The older generations did not openly participate in the Feminist or Gay Liberation Movement because of their closeted status. Often, they would defend themselves for remaining in the closet to keep their jobs and current life styles. The older generations did understand the significance of the lesbian-feminists. The radicalism of the lesbian-feminists made coming out as lesbian easier for even younger generations. While the older generations could not enjoy the pleasure of openly being gay, as was their choice, they did appreciate the advances that the lesbian-feminists brought to the lesbian community. Instead of feeling guilty for being homosexual, lesbians could accept their sexuality as natural. As Faderman claimed, "Homophobia, and not homosexuality, needed curing. It was not lesbians, they agreed, but society that was sick."<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 214.

Jo Freeman's article *Political Organization in the Feminist Movement* described how radicalism of the youth influenced the acceptance of lesbians into the National Organization for Women, NOW.<sup>150</sup> The Feminist Movement, according to Freeman, separated into two distinct branches. These two branches were the more political older generation and the more activist younger generation. Both branches were fighting for the rights of women. The second branch reflected most of the Buffalo area in that the younger generation focused on their particular community. They fought against injustices and accepted assistance from different activist groups. In particular they included lesbians, out or closeted, in their organizations. This approval was a key factor in accepting the fight against lesbian struggles as a women's issue.

According to Freeman, the success of the acceptance of lesbians into NOW was due to the common interests that both branches of feminism shared. Members of both branches focused on different ways to fight against sexism. The older branch was political and focused on interest groups in the government, while the younger branch rejected the political and focused on their surrounding community. In an example with Buffalo, politically the Mattachine Society fought for the rights of the local gay community. Some in the gay community believed that the Mattachine Society never did anything for the individual.<sup>151</sup> This was not the case in that some of the Mattachine Society members focused on political activism<sup>152</sup> while others focused on community involvement.<sup>153</sup> Women in these branches were educated and many of them resided in the middle-class. The branches also overlapped in that some of the women from the younger branch were active participants in NOW. Due to the commonality of the two branches, each branch influenced the other and formed friendships. This bond strengthened the need for

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<sup>150</sup> Jo Freeman, "Political Organization in the Feminist Movement," *Acta Sociologica*, 18, (1975): 222-244.

<sup>151</sup> Jim DeVinney, "Mattachine Society Stinks?" *The Fifth Freedom* 4, no. 1 (1974): 4-5, 14-15. Box 1, Folder 3.

<sup>152</sup> "Mattachine Talks to Republicans," *The Fifth Freedom* 5, no. 4 (1975):15. Box 1, Folder 4.

<sup>153</sup> "NEWS," *The Fifth Freedom* 4, no. 7 (1974): 11. Box 1, Folder 3.

acceptance of lesbian issues into the NOW agenda.

By 1973 NOW incorporated lesbian issues into their conferences. During a conference in 1971, a group of lesbians dressed in lavender shirts, a play on the phrase “lavender menace,” stormed the stage and took over the microphone. For hours lesbians talked about their struggles of not only being women but also of their sexual orientation. The members of NOW listened and accepted that lesbian issues were feminist issues. What surprised most attendees of that conference was the willingness to listen to the grievances that the lesbian group listed and the open discussion that followed.

The NOW chapter of Buffalo was very active and supportive of its lesbian sisters. Carol Speser was a member of the board of the NOW chapter in Buffalo during the 1970s. She recalls the experience fondly. When asked if her sisters supported her in her lesbian life style, she gave this unique tale of her first lesbian sexual experience. After the torturous past in dealing with her homosexual tendencies, Speser did not “come out of the closet” right away when she joined the NOW chapter of Buffalo, despite checking the box for lesbian. As she grew more and more comfortable with her sisters, she decided to come out to them. During one of the smaller discussion sessions for her small group, Speser confessed that she did not know whether she was a true lesbian or not because she never had sex with a woman. One of the members, who was openly a lesbian before Speser came out, offered to have sex right there and then. Instead of the NOW members scorning or laughing the suggestion off, they left the meeting. They coincidentally were meeting in Speser’s house that night so there was no inconvenience for her or her companion. Speser enjoyed a pleasurable evening with her fellow NOW member. This sums up the relationship that the NOW members had with one another. They openly supported one another in their decision-making, no matter the sexual orientation.

All of the women on the board of NOW, according to Speser, were activist friends. Their relationship with one another was positive and influential. These activist friends supported one another in their endeavors and sought guidance from one another. Speser defined activist friends as those friendships born out of the commonality of activism. They all had jobs that supported them financially but their main passion in life was activism. When the activism ended or changed, then the friendships would change with it. Drifting away from activist friendships did not leave bitter resentment but calm acceptance. Each woman understood that they had to evolve and sometimes that included letting friendships go with no resentment. Speser mentioned keeping in touch with a few of her activist friends, but not all.

The board of NOW in Buffalo, when Speser was a member, exemplified the stereotype of the “white middle-class feminism.” Each board member was white and educated. Speser described them all having “great consciousness...smart...and wanting to make a difference”. This created complications when trying to reach out to the public. Lesbians at the Gay Center in Buffalo were suspicious of Speser when she first arrived because they knew that she was a member of NOW. To the lesbians of Buffalo, NOW was a straight feminist organization. It was through discussion and getting to know the people of the different movements that created the trust between the different groups.

There were trust issues between groups, such as classism, which Speser addressed. Conflicts that arose in the Feminist Movement in Buffalo had to deal with class issues. The women on the board of NOW used their privilege to the advantage of others. Speser said that these privileged women used their power to create a better community for all involved, in spite of class differences. They used their education to strategize and accomplish the set goals of the Feminist Movement. The women learned that to overcome the class issues they needed to

connect to other women on a personal level. They did this by creating activist friendships, which created alliances.

The ability to jump from a middle-class feminist group to that of working-class or lesbian feminists came easily to Speser. Although she was white and educated herself, Speser found that making connections with a diverse group of people was easy if she listened before acting. Building bridges and alliances between groups of people is complicated. The education that Speser and the other women received greatly helped them with strategy. Speser stressed that friendships are the stronghold of the alliances between different social justice groups and that “people change when they know the other.” The success of the inclusion of lesbian issues into NOW’s agenda is a perfect example. When the group of lesbians announced their experiences and grievances, the feminists saw in them the struggles that they themselves faced and fought against. The feminist learned to “know the other” and accepted carrying on the fight for lesbian rights. Speser believed in the stance of approaching a new situation with a sense of fascination, not fear. It was always a person that breaks down the barriers, Speser claimed. After the person breaks through, then the concepts come, not before. The human connection was the most important, and always the first.

The people who are the firsts to make the connection are often the most ridiculed. Betty Friedan was the spokeswoman and head of the Feminist Movement for many years and had her share of censure. Speser has a list of firsts in dealing with the Buffalo community such as the mental health initiatives, domestic violence, and the local gay parade. Even though she was often scrutinized and criticized, Speser knew that the social changes were worth the effort. The temperament for succeeding in being an activist was the thought behind it. These were truths being fought for, not preferences. Speser believed that the universe gravitates towards freedom



and truth, based on her religious background. This sense of faith gave her strength and the tenacity to fight for individuals' rights.

Speser's fellow board members in NOW shared her views. When asked about any tension between board member, conflicting views and such, Speser said that conflicting philosophies was never a problem. Any tension among board members had to do with mundane things such as office work or scheduling. Typical tensions that are found in any organization were found with the board members, but overall they worked happily together. Everyone shared the same views so there was not tension philosophically. She described their unwavering support for her, individually. They completely accepted her as being a lesbian and backed any decisions that she made that were good for NOW and the Buffalo community.

An example would be that the national NOW wanted Buffalo to hold the official NOW conference. In the plans<sup>154</sup>, the NOW wanted Buffalo to have a lesbian pride parade go down Main Street. Although Buffalo was slowly accepting, the openness of their gay community they were nowhere near prepared to accept a pride parade, let alone one specifically for lesbians. Speser rejected the idea. Her friends stood behind her when she denied the idea. Buffalo was not ready for a lesbian pride parade. NOW was angered at the rejection but because of the support of her sisters Speser persuaded them to rethink the idea. Later on in the 1980s, Speser helped organize the first gay pride parade in Buffalo. Speser and the other women on the board of NOW chapter of Buffalo fully supported each other.

The community of Buffalo supported the feminists and their agenda by volunteering at events and fundraising. Numerous groups assisted Speser and her group in creating the "Women's Sexuality Symposium." The symposium had multiple speakers and panels that discussed women's sexuality. Some of the organizations that assisted in this symposium were

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<sup>154</sup> The year was not mentioned.

Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, Buffalo Psychiatric Center, Medaille College, NOW, Planned Parenthood of Buffalo, Inc., and Young Women's Christian Association of Buffalo and Erie County. Speser described how NOW would informally raise money among the Buffalo businesses and organizations, showing their support for the cause. NOW members approached local businesses for help and local businesses would reach out to members in order to contribute. This communication back and forth was even on both sides because each side knew the other. Speser said that it was so easy to communicate because everyone already had connections to each other.

Another important relationship that Speser and her activist friends had were with the media. The media included print and video. Emma bookstore was a feminist bookstore that eventually shut down, but before its demise, numerous feminist literature transferred to Buffalo through its shelves. Speser recalled a reporter for the Buffalo News that wrote articles on subjects that not many reporters considered to investigate. Louise Continelli was not afraid of investigating different stories that were almost taboo at the time. She covered news on the interagency for women's issues in Buffalo and became familiar with the feminist community. Continelli then wanted to go undercover as a lesbian and go have a night out on the town. She was a major influence in the media for the feminist and lesbian community. The *Buffalo News* also did a spread on Speser as being an active gay person in the community.<sup>155</sup> Continelli covered the article with Speser's help. It was the first spread about an individual person being gay in the Buffalo newspapers. With the media's help, the feminist and lesbian community announced their presence and their accomplishments to the city of Buffalo.

Getting the media in Buffalo to cover the gay community in a positive light was a

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<sup>155</sup> Louise Continelli, "Out and Proud/ For the Estimated 100,000 Gay Western New Yorkers, the Bad Old Days Of Open Hostility Are Mostly Gone/." *Buffalo News (New York)*, April 25, 2004, [www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic](http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic) (accessed May 7, 2014).

continuous struggle. A prominent example was when Don Michaels, a gay man in Buffalo, went to the Buffalo Evening News Office to put an ad in the paper about the grand opening of the Gay Services Center. He was rejected after going through many job “superiors”. When he asked why the ad was rejected Michaels was told, “that our ‘group’ was on a list of ‘groups’ from which the News would not accept advertising.”<sup>156</sup> The Mattachine Society did engage in dialogue with the media of Buffalo. A year after being rejected by the *Buffalo Evening News*, the Mattachine Society reported “PUBLIC RELATIONS IMPROVE as channels 2 and 7 cover the new Center’s opening at 1350 Main St. As the community comes more and more to know of our exist[e]nce we continue to serve in many ways, and now the media are taking note. For the second time this week Channel 7 has moved in with their support, this time highlighting discrimination in the community[.]”<sup>157</sup> This now continuously open dialogue between the gay community and the media of Buffalo improved over time. There were still setbacks such as the lack of attention to lesbians in the media community.<sup>158</sup> The slow acceptance of the lesbian community remained a problem in the Buffalo media.

As the Buffalo community developed to accept lesbians and feminists into everyday life with consciousness raising groups and publications, the college campuses and public opinion changed around the nation. In Cynthia Secor’s article *Lesbians - The Doors Open* she reiterated how the lesbian academics were slowly becoming more visible due to the Feminist and Gay Liberation Movement. On college campuses, for five years before 1975 according to the article, the lesbian issue was a feminist issue. *The Fifth Freedom*, often asked for speakers from the gay community to educate at local colleges, including SUNYAB and Canisius.<sup>159</sup> Students accepted

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<sup>156</sup> “News Says No!” *The Fifth Freedom* 3, no. 5 (1973): 2. Box 1, Folder 2.

<sup>157</sup> “NEWS,” *The Fifth Freedom* 4, no. 7 (1974): 11. Box 1, Folder 3.

<sup>158</sup> “Is the Media Out of the Closet??” *The Fifth Freedom* 4, no. 7 (1974): 14. Box 1, Folder 3.

<sup>159</sup> “Speaking Out!” *The Fifth Freedom* 4, no. 3 (1974): 12. Box 1, Folder 3.

that lesbian struggles were feminist struggles and addressed them as such. Openly active lesbians were always feminist activists on the college campuses. These small groups did not influence many lesbian academics to come out themselves.

It was not until 1973 that lesbian college academics formed organizations specifically for college campuses. These organizations included: “the Gay Academic Union (GAU) with its highly successful national convention; the National Gay Task Force (NGTF), headed by Dr. Howard J. Brown, the former Commissioner of Health of New York City; and caucuses in the Modern Language Association (MLA), the American Historical Association (AHA), and the American Anthropological Association (AAA).”<sup>160</sup> These organizations were specifically for addressing the Gay Liberation Movement on the college campuses. The Gay Academic Union not only supported gay rights, but also women’s rights. Their goal was to stop the oppression of the sexes and that included supporting feminism.

These organizations created a safe environment for homosexuals to gather on college campuses. The ability to gather safely on college campuses enabled professors to petition for curriculum on the growing subject. Women Studies professors were the most open to creating classes that surrounded the study of homosexuality. Secor claimed that the fate of the lesbian or homosexual studies lied in the hands of the feminists on campus. Whether or not college students accepted the new curriculum depended on the acceptance of lesbians within the local feminist community. In Buffalo, the local feminist community welcomed lesbians. The educational panels and symposia supported lesbians through feminist initiatives. At SUNY Buffalo State, the Women Studies department formed as a discipline during this time.

The history of the Women and Gender Studies minor at SUNY Buffalo State began as a

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<sup>160</sup> Cynthia Secor, “Lesbian: The Doors Open,” *Change* 7 (1975): 14.

group of academic subject matter, in 1970.<sup>161</sup> This meant that there were courses that were rewritten to include feminist theories and practices. The group evolved from creating specific courses that focused on feminist issues to having its own unit, in 1978. This unit was first known as Women's Studies Academy.<sup>162</sup> The Women's Studies Academy developed a charge of procedures, developed a core committee, and had written its first newsletter, in 1978. They were granted an academic minor status in 1980 and in 1981 changed their name from Women's Studies Academy to the Women's Studies Interdisciplinary Unit (WSIU), "reflecting BSC's commitment to the inclusion of women, their work, and their concerns in the college curriculum."<sup>163</sup>

The WSIU minor developed over the years to include more classes, students, and activities for all campus students.<sup>164</sup> These activities include symposia around women's issues and annual special celebrations for women's history month. Class options grew from six to twenty-three courses and the minor held a steady twelve students. In 1993, there were changes to the requirements for the minor that included a drop from twenty-one credits needed to only eighteen and the elimination of an internship or independent study. This increased the amount of students willing to complete the minor.<sup>165</sup> In the present day, the name has changed from The Women's Studies Interdisciplinary Unity to Women and Gender Studies. It remains a minor at SUNY Buffalo State. The Women Studies minor at SUNY Buffalo State addressed the lesbian community and their concerns as seen through the media in their current archives.

The Women Studies archives holds numerous journals and newspapers on lesbian and

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<sup>161</sup> "History of the SUCB Women's Studies Interdisciplinary Unit (WSUI)." Archives and Special Collections at SUNY Buffalo State (March 1996): 1-2.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 2.

feminist relations from the 1970s Feminist Movement. One of the journals that the archives keeps is *off our backs*. The journal *off our backs* was a feminist journal that distributed news and opinions on feminist issues. An issue that *off our backs* focused on was lesbianism and how feminists needed to learn to accept all sisters into the Feminist Movement.<sup>166</sup> This journal was neither heterosexually or homosexually dominant. The goal of this journal was to inform the public on the opinions and changing issues of the Feminist Movement. The Women Studies archive in SUNY Buffalo State houses issues of this journal, specifically issues with entries about the acceptance of lesbians into the feminist community.

These journals were not directly reflective of the views of the SUNY Buffalo State campus at the time. It is not to say that the professors of the Women Studies program acquired these journals just for the articles on the acceptance of lesbianism. The numerous other articles and journals that the collection has kept was a great indicator of the growing acceptance of lesbians on the campus.

People cause change, according to Speser, once the people begin to change then their views and goals follow. Instead of standing up for lesbian rights or gay rights, Speser emphasized that her activist friends stood up for her, as a friend. When her friends supported her, they were supporting gay rights but it was because of one person that they supported that belief at the time. The connections that people make are the most important. Focusing on the people made the movement more genuine and successful.

After graduating from college, Speser returned to Buffalo where she helped to create *Directory for Therapists* by The Counseling Referral Service for Women. This pamphlet is a directory of approved feminist therapists that women could go to and feel safe. The directory covered Buffalo and Erie County from 1977-78. The psychologists cover a range of services,

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<sup>166</sup> Fran Pollner, "Lesbian Dynamics," *off our backs*, February/March, (1973): 7.

from marriage counseling to crisis intervention. The Counseling Referral Service for Women understood the prejudices and fears that came with seeing a psychologist. They made it their goal “to make the mental health field responsive to the needs of women. We must have non-sexist counselors whose awareness of womens’ struggles enables them to help women realize their full potential.”<sup>167</sup> These struggles included homosexuality. Speser created a tool for women to use when they sought guidance. Her experience with a strong and positive psychologist enabled Speser to create that environment and experience for other women.

*The Directory for Therapists* by The Counseling Referral Service for Women was three years in the making. Speser and her colleagues interviewed every psychologist in the directory. The group of women who helped with the project are listed, along with a recognition for the Buffalo Chapter of NOW. In the feminist tradition, there are no specific leaders listed in creating the directory. Instead, all of the women were listed as a group and in alphabetical order. Speser wrote the introduction in the directory but she attributed all of the work as a group effort from the women listed. This directory was a major accomplishment and highly distributed in the Buffalo area. Speser described the experience as transformative. The directory created positive change that allowed women to expect a better and more wholesome experience in counseling sessions.

Catch phrases and mottos were the easiest way for Gay Liberation and Feminists to change people’s view within society. Speser talked of buttons and t-shirts that had phrases on them, designed to make people think. These phrases encapsulated what the two movements wanted to achieve. For the feminists the phrase, “A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle” captured the heart of the Feminist Movement. A woman was not defined by her

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<sup>167</sup> *Directory for Therapists* Buffalo & Erie County, NY: The Counseling Referral Service for Women.,1997, 1.

relationship to a man, but by a person with her own identity. This phrase made people think about how a woman did not need a man to survive. For Speser, this changed people's thinking. For the Gay Liberation Movement, "We are the people your mother warned you about" and "We're here, we're queer, get used to it" were just some examples of the phrases they used. The "we're here, we're queer, get used to it" was a phrase that utilized the word "queer" in a positive light. Speser believed that using that specific word meant that the homosexuals took it back from their oppressors. These phrases were catchy and they made people think, which was their goal.

The eventual change of accepting lesbians into the Feminist Movement started mainly on the national level and then trickled down to the local level. In the interview, Speser described how she and, her partner at the time, another board member, were sent to a national NOW conference in order to report back. Although the two women missed the conference, from looking at the programs, Speser and her lover gathered information and reported back to Buffalo. It was crucial that the feminist community in Buffalo wanted to follow NOW on the same national level. This meant that the Buffalo community advanced along with the nation and the nation accepted lesbian issues. Most projects started at a national level and then were filtered to the local level. Speser claimed that Buffalo was different in that because of the isolation from other places. Buffalo had some firsts for the entire Feminist Movement before the national level.

Most of the firsts that Buffalo experienced dealt with policy. According to Speser, Buffalo had one of the first non-discrimination policies in the country. Christy Mallory and Sarah Liebowitz backed up this claim in their article, *Local Laws and Government Policies Prohibiting Discrimination Based on Gender Identity in New York*. Although the article did not state exactly when these laws were established, it did state that they were created and approved as the first such laws of their kind in the entire nation. These laws protect against discrimination



of sex and gender in employment, housing, public accommodations, government services, education, and credit.<sup>168</sup>

Speser attributed Buffalo's unique ability to adapt ahead of the nation to its working-class background. In some ways this background also hindered progress, such as not having a lesbian parade when the NOW wanted it. Speser claimed that Buffalo had a strong connection to its people and that helped in advancing the community. The attributes of being a strong, artistic, working-class community made Buffalo a prime spot for social change. Buffalonians had a strong sense of pride for their city that urged them to create positive change.

This blue collar atmosphere, an action-oriented mentality, attributed to having feminist meetings inside a bar rather than a room with chairs in a circle. Speser helped to start, in Buffalo, the first lesbian organization for minority women called SHADES. It was a military woman who ended up in charge of SHADES. When SHADES first began, late in 1992, it was an informal group meeting at different members' houses, on Sundays. It was not until 1993 that official officers were elected and the first president was Sherrie Lowther. Men and women were encouraged to attend the meetings and all events. In an introductory speech for the promotion of SHADES, Speser said, "Well, sometimes in a room full of people you can feel isolated and alone if you are the only black person there."<sup>169</sup> Lowther's philosophy was having fun instead of talking about feelings. What ended up happening during the fun were heart to hearts with other members. The SHADES organization is still active in Buffalo.

The first leader of SHADES understood that if everyone talked about their feelings while sitting in a circle that the atmosphere of the organization would sadden. The purpose of the

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<sup>168</sup> Christie Mallory & Sarah Liebowitz, "Local laws and government policies prohibiting discrimination based on gender identity in New York," *The Williams Institute*, June 2013, <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Mallory-Liebowitz-NY-local-laws-Jun-2013.pdf> (accessed April 9, 2014), 3.

<sup>169</sup> Carol Speser, "Introduction" (speech Buffalo, NY, 1992), Madeline Davis GLBT Archives of Western NY. Box 48, Folder 25.

organization was to bring lesbians of color together and the best way to keep it running was through action, not words. This resulted in parties and other events that lesbians of color could attend and participate in. Speser pointed out that the Feminist and Gay Liberation Movement started in big cities like New York and San Francisco, where backgrounds were various and stories needed sharing in order to understand one another. In Buffalo there was no need to understand one another's backgrounds because the community was so close that they already interacted with each other. Buffalo's close community allowed for more action oriented activism rather than passive activism.

The media of the Feminist and Gay Liberation Movement often fluctuated due to its instability. *The Furies* was a magazine for lesbians that eventually went out of print, the feminist bookstore Emma in Buffalo closed its doors and all due to lack of funding. Speser created the first gay magazine in Buffalo called *Pride Path* that ended after six issues due to lack of funding. She described how hard it was to get advertisements in the magazine because no one wanted to be seen associated with a gay magazine in Buffalo. Gay people did not want to openly support the magazine and straight people did not want to be mistaken for gay people. *Pride Path* magazine had no monetary support and no magazine company would sell it on the shelves. Speser went into debt after creating the magazine, however it paved the road for other gay magazines as more and more businesses decided to support them.

## **Further Research and Conclusion**

### **Further Research**

The recommendations for further research lie within the personal relationships of lesbians and feminists. Davis and Kennedy interviewed and researched countless lesbians in the Buffalo

area. This preserved the lesbian community of Buffalo's heritage and opened more research for lesbian stories. Carol Speser emphasized that it was people and events that changed society. When Gloria Steinem stood by her friend, Kate Millet it exemplified the bonds that could be made between the feminist and lesbian communities. Researching and examining how the similarities within the relationships between activists and non-activists guided the individual thought change that eventually lead to changes in societal beliefs. More research into the personal relationships of activists would focus more on those people.

The information on lesbians and feminists is abundant. SUNY Buffalo State has three archives, The Gender Studies Archives, the Madeline Davis Archives, and the general archives on SUNY Buffalo State campus, full of information for the interested reader. In my research, I came upon a thick folder of information about the SHADES organization in Buffalo, New York. This organization was not created during the second wave of feminism but it has a rich history that needs to be examined. SHADES was the result of people coming together and forming relationships (e.i., Carol Speser, Sherrie Lowther, etc).

DIGNITY/BUFFALO, the Catholic organization created to give the gay community a safe place to worship has two thick folders dedicated to its history. The activism between lesbians and feminists did not end in the 1970s. Further research can be done on the periods before and after the 1970s. *The Fifth Freedom* has boxes dedicated to it and the Mattachine Society. Looking into the dynamics of that organization can shed the light on lesbian relations within the gay community. There were tensions between the lesbians and gay men in Buffalo. Further research into this subject could explain why lesbians stayed with the Gay Liberation Movement, or not.

Relationships were integral to the Feminist and Gay Liberation Movements. Whether

these relationships were platonic or romantic, they made a difference in the movements and people's lives. I suggest further research into the relationships of lesbians and feminists. What classism, racism, and sexism did they face together or accuse each other of? What relationships failed, succeeded, or faded over time, yet highly influenced the power of the Feminist and Gay Liberation Movements? These questions could be answered with further research into the relationships created by and for activism.

## **Conclusion**

There were similarities between lesbians and feminists. Each group had the goal of liberation and equality for women. They wanted something more than society, at that time, would give them. Both groups wanted legal power and to gain equal footing within society. Their goals were the same in that they desired equality and acceptance from society. Although their core values were the same to elevate women's status in society, they did not always agree with one another.

Lesbians fought mainly for the right of women being able to love whomever they wanted, without prejudice and repercussions from society. In Buffalo, the Sisters of Sappho held dances and ran services for women only. These dances gave lesbians a social arena besides the bars and the services provided mental health counseling for those women in need. They fought for their rights, even in the face of sexism from their fellow gay community members. Lesbians worked for the betterment of homosexual women.

Feminists fought mainly for the equality of women in society. They wanted to elevate the entire female sex, regardless of race, creed, class, or sexual preference. Together, they wanted to achieve an equal status with men in society and the law. The feminists in Buffalo created their

own chapter of NOW, which supported women's efforts. Carol Speser and her collective created referral services for women so when the women searched for mental health care services, they could easily find a safe place to heal. Such programs aided the female community in Buffalo and surrounding areas. The feminists fought and provided for the betterment of all women.

Despite wanting to elevate all women, the feminists were accused of only focusing on the problems of straight white middle-class women. Working-class feminists fought alongside working-class men, because of their similar goals. While middle-class feminists worked for legal reform, working-class feminists worked for equal pay and health benefits. Feminists of color worked against sexism and racism in society while white feminists just worked against sexism. This disconnect created tensions between feminists. NOW attempted to bridge the gaps between middle-class versus working class and white women versus women of color with conferences and social programs such as the NOW Bill of Rights.

In basic form, the lesbians and feminists were fighting for the betterment of women, yet these two communities often clashed. Lesbians faced sexism in the gay community. The obvious void in female writers and lesbian articles in *The Fifth Freedom* reiterate that fact. There were articles addressing this problem of sexism but that did not solve it. So when the lesbians looked to the feminists for support they were sadly disappointed. Feminists also faced sexism and were ridiculed using lesbian baiting. When the lesbians came to the feminist community in search of support they found fear instead. Feminists feared that associating with lesbians would tarnish their image. This fear came out of lesbian baiting and the total rejection from men. Not all feminists feared lesbians.

Radical feminists claimed to have no need for men, therefore they were not fearful of accepting lesbians into the Feminist Movement. This claim only went so far. As the lesbian

community found out, while the radical feminists supported lesbians, they still did not want to focus on or discuss lesbian issues at length like the lesbian community wanted. Instead, the radical lesbians looked to the elimination of sex roles and wanted to start with a fresh society.

With the feminist community silencing their sexuality and the gay community silencing their sex, the lesbian community ended up creating a combination between the two. Lesbian feminists were feminists that discussed and fought for the rights of lesbian women. They wanted an elevated social status equal to men but they also wanted the sexual freedom that heterosexuals enjoyed. They still worked with the gay and feminist communities but now they had their own separate sect. This did not stop tensions between and within the lesbian and feminist communities.

The tensions created between these groups lessened when individual people connected over issues. Gloria Steinem was a feminist who openly supported lesbian rights. Even though the lesbian community criticized her *Ms.* magazine's lack of attention of lesbian issues, Steinem still played a vital role in bridging the gaps between lesbians and feminists. She personally sat next to and held Kate Millet's hand during a press conference about Millet's sexual preferences. It was Steinem's openness to homosexuality that influenced other feminists to follow her example. Ti-Grace Atkinson also supported Kate Millet at the press conference. Atkinson was a radical feminist who wrote articles and had multiple interviews on TV. Her media connections influenced the way the media handled and reported on feminist issues.

In Buffalo, Carol Speser and Madeline Davis exemplified the importance of the human connection. Carol Speser was a lesbian on the board of NOW but because of her friendships with the other board members, they accepted and supported her sexuality. Speser's human connection helped to create SHADES, a lesbian organization for women of color. Madeline Davis created

connections between politicians and the gay community. She was on the Governor's Task Force for Gay Issues, and helped to create dialogue between the government and the gay community of Buffalo. She and Elizabeth Kennedy created a history of the lesbian community in Buffalo, thus cementing the history of the lesbian community in Buffalo. Davis and Speser were friends and activists together, making a personal connection that influenced each other and the betterment of the community of Buffalo.

The feminist and lesbian relations in Buffalo and the Nation were tumultuous. Both communities wanted the advancement of women but in different ways. There were times when the communities supported each other, such as the 1971 Resolution and there were times when the communities fought against each other, resulting in lesbian feminists. These issues between them were about class, race, and sexual preference.

When they did agree and cooperate with one another it was over a personal connection. Buffalo's NOW chapter worked with the lesbian community due to the influence of its members, especially Carol Speser. The entire NOW passed the 1971 Resolution due to supporters like Gloria Steinem. The Buffalo community, like the nation, changed its view on feminism and lesbianism because of the personal connections. Overall, the lesbians and feminists worked together and separately for the betterment of women. Julia Penelope put it best when she said, "[i]t was the WLM [Women's Liberation Movement], with its weaknesses and strengths, its contradictions and insights, and its tensions and break-throughs that called forth in many of us the vision of Lesbians living and working together."<sup>170</sup> Lesbian and feminist relations were tense but occasionally, through personal connections, they worked together.

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<sup>170</sup> Julia Penelope, "The Mystery of Lesbians," *Gossip* Volume 1, no. 1 (1986): 19.

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